

Hush Now (You Were Lost but Now You're Found)

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/30646853) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/30646853>.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	Gen
Fandoms:	Dream SMP , Minecraft (Video Game) , Video Blogging RPF
Relationships:	Wilbur Soot & Technoblade & TommyInnit & Phil Watson , Clay Dream & TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) , Sam Awesamdude & TommyInnit , Niki Nihachu & TommyInnit , Eret & TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) , Alexis Quackity & TommyInnit , Toby Smith Tubbo & Ranboo & TommyInnit , GeorgeNotFound & Sapnap & TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF)
Characters:	TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) , Wilbur Soot , Technoblade (Video Blogging RPF) , Phil Watson (Video Blogging RPF) , Clay Dream (Video Blogging RPF) , Sam Awesamdude (Video Blogging RPF) , Toby Smith Tubbo , Ranboo (Video Blogging RPF) , Niki Nihachu , Eret (Video Blogging RPF) , Alexis Quackity , GeorgeNotFound (Video Blogging RPF) , Sapnap (Video Blogging RPF) , BadBoyHalo (Video Blogging RPF) , Jschlatt (Video Blogging RPF) , Karl Jacobs , Kristin Rosales Watson , Charlie Slimecicle , Dream SMP Ensemble
Additional Tags:	Families of Choice , Family Dynamics , Enemies to Friends to Family , Angst and Hurt/Comfort , Depression , Panic Attacks , Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder - PTSD , Hero TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) , Lonely TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) , Touch-Starved TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) , Complicated Relationships , Dark Sleepy Bois Inc , Protective Sleepy Bois Inc , Sleepy Bois Inc as Family , Morally Ambiguous Character , Possessive Behavior , Codependency , TommyInnit Needs a Hug (Video Blogging RPF) , Oblivious TommyInnit (Video Blogging RPF) , I mean he's smart but he's also a bit of an idiot when it comes to people , Secret Identity , Identity Reveal , Trust Issues , Loss of Trust , Self-Harm , Kidnapping , Non-Consensual Drug Use , Interrogation , Torture , Aftermath of Torture , Blood and Gore , Body Horror , Dead Dove: Do Not Eat , TommyInnit is Not Okay (Video Blogging RPF) , Wilbur Soot is Not Okay , Feral Behavior , Domestic Fluff , Brotherly Affection , Platonic Cuddling , Unreliable Narrator , Self-Discovery , Rated For Violence , Alternate Universe - Superheroes/Superpowers
Language:	English
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Stats:

Published: 2021-04-13 Updated: 2023-04-09 Words: 301,343 Chapters: 56/?

Hush Now (You Were Lost but Now You're Found)

by [CorpseArt](#)

Summary

Red Chaos was the name the world had bestowed upon him, and Dream had laughed as he dragged Tommy down against his chest in a rough sprawl back against the couch, squeezing him tight after their first official mission together.

Tommy had done good and Dream had been proud.

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Siren shifts, a look Tommy can't be bothered to understand flashing briefly before his shoulders roll into a shrug.

"You saved my life."

I know, Tommy thinks, lips drawing back in an ugly grimace. *It ruined mine.*

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The morning paper lies discarded on the couch beside him with black bold headlines:

RED CHAOS: HERO OR VILLAIN?

Hero

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy jerks, stomach clenching as he becomes aware of the filthy water he's half drenched in, one hand twisting to push himself off the ground as he dry heaves against the inside of his mask before a miserable shiver crawls down his spine.

"Your arm is broken."

He collapses back, head hitting bricks, dirty water spreading damp through his jeans as he stares dully at the Villain who tilts his head, bird like, on his haunches on top of a dumpster, skin flickering blue, a precaution, wary despite the absolutely atrocious state Tommy's in.

It makes his bleeding lip tug up despite himself as he snorts. "No shit."

The Siren, one of the most feared Villains in L'Manberg, maroon beanie crammed down, face covered by a mask that slots all the way up his nose, golden brown eyes not veering from him.

His enemy. Current, former - Tommy just don't *know* anymore.

What happens when a Hero isn't a Hero anymore? It feels like the shittiest time to find out, the power dampener clamped tight around his wrist, put there by the man who had saved him, had given him a home, a place, an identity-

Only to tear it all away from him.

"You're bleeding."

"If you're just here to state the fucking obvious feel free to swan off and do that elsewhere," Tommy grumbles as he huffs a tired sigh. "Or, ya know, if you're here to kill me, don't drag it out because I don't have the patience for it."

Siren shifts, a look Tommy can't be bothered to understand flashing briefly before his shoulders roll into a shrug.

"You saved my life."

I know, Tommy thinks, lips drawing back in an ugly grimace. *It ruined mine.*

"I felt like I owed it to you to not let you die in a dirty alley, at least."

"Thanks," Tommy scoffs.

Its dark, the moon barely visible in the clouds above them.

“I’ll be on my way then,” Siren hums, hand rising in a jaunty little wave, form flickering in front of Tommy’s vision until there’s nothing there. “*Favour repaid and all that,*” a ghostly echo whispers against his ear.

It’s just another shitty day in a shitty city.

It’s been twenty-three hours since Tommy lost everything.

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Tommy stumbles into his apartment, door kicked shut behind him, uncaring of the dirty water he’s tracking inside with squishy sneakers as he yanks the bathroom door open, hand already grasping at his hoodie to get it off.

His arm is stiff, wrapped in thick plaster, a last *favour* from Dream before he’d been quite unceremoniously kicked out of the tower, and it takes a frustrating amount of swearing to get it off and drop it down in a watery puddle at his feet.

His jeans follows after a rough wrestle to get the goddamn *button* open and *fuck*, maybe he should just not pay the water bill because he’s not spending four weeks of this every time he needs to take a fucking *piss*.

His t-shirt is, thankfully, less of an issue as he bends over to let gravity to the last of the work with a shiver that crawls up his bare back as he straightens out, one hand yanking his beanie off to let it fall uncaringly to the floor.

His mask is still on his face, a metallic contraption with filter for smoke and toxins that slots over his jaw and up over the bridge of his nose, and his hand gingerly frames and presses down on the hidden slots that releases with a low rush of air to allow him to pull it off.

He knows he should keep the plaster in place but there’s a vicious need to get every last piece of Dream *off him* which makes him sink his fingers into it, squeezing until it cracks, tearing it off with nails that bends, pinpricks of pain crawling up his arm, familiar and comforting as the last bit clinging to the curl of his thumb drops to the white floor.

He stares down at it for a long moment before raising his head to stare into the small mirror in the cramped bathroom.

He looks like shit.

His blond hair is flat and grimy, wet in spots where dirty alley water had crept through both his hood and hat, and he’s more bruises than flesh courtesy of the Angel of Death who’d taken him for a tour before Tommy managed to sink his knife into the man’s side.

The slam to the ground in the aftermath is the reason his arm dangles splotchy red and useless at his side, swollen from the break beneath his skin, and he twists to look at his back which is ugly and dark around the knobbly white press of his spine.

Most of it will fade with time, he knows, but there’s a deep line on his thigh that will need to be doused in alcohol before he stitches it shut, grit clinging dark to the edges from the dirty

alley water, and he knows he hadn't been doing himself any favours with *that* detour.

There's dark spots beneath his eyes, mouth flattened in a downward turn, and he turns his head as best as he can to comb away his hair, trying to get a good look at the wound responsible for the blood running in a crusted line down the side of his face.

"Could be worse," he tells himself, voice rough and scratchy before huffing a tired breath and turning on his heel for the shower.

-

Huddled beneath a thick blanket from the unceremonious cold shower – and was going to have another conversation with his landlord about that because *fucking hell* – Tommy sits with one foot hauled up on the low table in front of his couch, a cooling cup of ramen steaming beside it as he hooks the crooked needle into his flesh and tugs roughly to draw it shut.

It's shitty work – he's never been the best in the first place and his left hand is ridiculously weak where he tries to press the wound together as he works and he soon gives up, knotting and pulling the best he can to leave it in a wonky line before flopping back, staring up at the ceiling.

He has some money saved, thankfully. Enough to at least get him through the next three months, if no Villain manages to sniff him out before that.

The morning paper lies discarded on the couch beside him with black bold headlines:

RED CHAOS: HERO OR VILLAIN?

There's a blurry picture beneath it, Tommy in full Hero-regalia crouched protectively over Siren's unconscious body, gun raised and cocked against the Number One Hero who stands visible only in side-profile with his green hoodie and white masked face with that *stupid* smile.

Dream. His friend, his mentor, his *saviour*:

And Tommy had-

He breathes out through clenched teeth and drags his foot off the table before he leans forward and snatches up his cup of noodles, squeezing it gingerly between his knees before reaching for the chopsticks, snapping them between his teeth before poking it into the broth, giving it a swirl.

The apartment feels cold and empty and it's entirely of his own making.

-

Life goes on.

Tommy stuffs his Hero suit, freshly washed, beneath his bed with his mask on top and pretends that his heart doesn't ache as he shoves it out of sight before straightening out, grimacing as his joints pop.

"Already creaking like an old man, Tommy? You're only sixteen."

He scrubs a hand over his face tiredly before he lumbers over to his wardrobe, yanking out one of the many hoodies Dream had bought and hid in his apartment during the years he'd known the man.

His mentor had always had a peculiar way of caring, lofty and teasing affection, pokes and gifts snuck in and left to be discovered when he least expected it.

Tommy loathes gifts. Dream hadn't given him much choice, feigning surprise when Tommy would shove it into his face, all teeth and demands to take it back.

Dream had fooled no-one.

Tommy had kept each and every one.

It's the only decent kind of clothes he owes past t-shirts and jeans, all of them dark in colour to hide eventual bloodstains.

He stares at the obnoxious orange thing in his hand, twisting it clumsily to look down at the raccoon on the front of it, cradling a cola with *Trash Panda* written in a scrawl.

He brings it up to his face, burying burning eyes into the fabric as he hunches over himself.

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RED CHAOS: HERO OR VILLAIN?

Last night the famed sidekick of the Top Hero Dream was arrested and brought in for questioning.

A photo has been seen circulating from a brave civilian who stood to see the former-Hero level a gun against his mentor, by all appearance protecting Siren, one of the leading members of the Syndicate-

"He's been released from his service."

"Red Chaos is no-longer a Hero."

-

"Are you looking for workers?" Tommy demands gruffly, one hand in his pocket, the other dangling at his side, wrapped in white bandages beneath the orange fabric.

There's a white band aid over his nose, ears red from the cold, and he misses his jacket which still hangs on a crook in Dream's apartment.

He tries not to look pathetic as the tall green haired man lowers his book to peer up at him.

It had taken him nearly a week to pick out a place that he felt decently optimistic about not being kicked out off the second he took a step into it.

Sam and Fran's, a small café nestled in with red bricks among its darker neighbours, a white wolf-like dog painted in broad strokes with a happy grin on the sign.

There'd been a bell that rang as he stepped inside and the furniture is mismatched but comfortable looking, couches and armchairs instead of stiff chairs, and there's sandwiches, hot beverages and all sorts of sweet things he doesn't really recognise behind a glass counter.

He shifts uncomfortably as the man hums, folding his book closed and sliding it aside to give him his full attention.

Golden eyes, a sclera of black, dark green splotches against his skin, a hybrid of some sort Tommy had decided as he watched the man close his store up one evening.

"I'm Sam, the owner of this place," the man tells him and there's a smile on his face.

"I don't have any prior experience," Tommy blurts out, shoulders hunching a bit defensively. "And no education but I can read and write and math and shit."

Sam blinks at him and Tommy tries his best not to scowl.

"What's your name?"

He flushes dark red. "Tommy," he gets out. "Just- Tommy."

"It's very nice to meet you, Tommy," Sam says warmly and Tommy shifts in discomfort. "It's only really me working here," Sam tells him. "And Fran," he says with a gesture towards the large white pool of fur at his feet, eyes momentarily soft. "I'm sure we can find a place for you here as well."

A part of him wants nothing more than to turn his back right there and then, to give up on this shitty endeavour because Tommy doesn't *do* people but-

He needs a job. His funds will only last him so long and he refuses to go back to the streets.

"I appreciate it," he bites out and bows his head, just like Dream had taught him to.

-

Tommy has always been quick on his feet, fast to pick things up, one of the many reasons that had endeared him to Dream in the first place. He was easily distracted but if he wanted to learn he'd be *damned* if he didn't.

Which is why he's quietly cursing out the shitty coffee machine after scalding his fingers, mouth twisting in a mulish grimace that just barely gets smoothed out as he turns to place the

cup of ready espresso on the small waiting plate which then gets transferred to the small tray Sam had given him when he'd realised his arm was broken.

The man hadn't remarked on it, more than a steady look that offered an ear if he wanted it, and Tommy had only just kept himself from snarling.

The scent makes his nose wrinkle as he lifts it up, coffee and sugary sweetness in the shape of a green frog beside it, because Sam, for some reason, liked baking all sorts of odd things in the shape of animals.

Tommy had been forced to try out a blueberry thing in the shape of a bunny just the other day and he'd tried very hard not to feel guilty when he bit its neck off.

Barbaric is what it is but he finds it hard to say as much when Sam looks all hopefully at him.

He delivers it to the woman with pink hair working quietly at one of the tables and receives a distracted smile that he nods sharply at before ambling back and slouching down on the chair behind the counter.

Sam and Fran's, Tommy is quickly coming to appreciate, is not a people crowder. Quite frankly he has no idea how Sam keeps it afloat but for all he knows it could just be money invested into a hobby to have something to do. Sam favoured clothing that made him increasingly decide that it had to be the answer to it. Easy, comfortable, but *pricey*, the same kind of shitty flex that made Dream's hoodies ridiculously soft for all that they didn't look much.

Tommy knows more about clothing than is firmly reasonable for someone who has never bought a shirt in his life.

It had been part of the job, after all.

He blows out a sigh, staring blankly out the café window, bored out of his mind.

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The power dampener on his wrist is a constant reminder.

It's silver, strangely warm from the power Bad had layered into it, meant to keep it from breaking, meant to keep him from ever-

He opens his eyes one night in his kitchen to find himself with a knife half-buried into his wrist in an attempt to tear it off, skin slick with dark red blood that drops to pool on the tiles at his bare feet, blade ruined and not a scratch to be seen on the metal.

He washes the knife, stitches the wound shut, wraps his arm up, and climbs out on the roof to stare out over the city that had been his protect.

-

Tommy meets Wilbur on his second week of working at Sam's, the man tall enough that he has to duck his head as he lumbers inside, the motion well familiar, clearly one of Sam's regulars judging by the way he halts, staring at Tommy as if he's something foreign.

Tommy scowls back at him.

"You're new," he greets, voice smooth, eyes searching past him for Sam who is working in the back. "I didn't know Sam hired a child to work for him."

"Fuck you too," Tommy bites out, unimpressed. "Order or get the fuck out."

A curly brown fringe, round glasses on the tip of a pointy nose, gangly like a string bean in a loose yellow shirt, a delighted grin slowly blossoming on his face as his eyes focuses on him with new interest.

Tommy's first impression of Wilbur is that he's a fucking *weirdo*.

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"There are tables *right there*," Tommy hisses as Wilbur drags a chair across the floor to take a seat next to the counter in an easy comfortable sprawl.

"Coffee, black please."

Tommy twitches, eyes narrowing, but- he'd rather not try his luck with distracting Sam during work hours and he turns with a string of curses to get the noisy coffee machine working, cup shoved into place and fingers firmly out of place as it hisses and splutters.

"You have a filthy mouth for a child," Wilbur comments as he pries a laptop from a rough-looking leather satchel, placing it on top of ridiculously long legs, ankles folding together. "What does Sam think about that?"

"Sam doesn't care as long as I don't curse out costumers," Tommy snips as he shoves the cup at the other, one of their ugliest, orange and pink splotched with something that might have been a duck on the side.

"And I'm not one?" Wilbur asks, one eyebrow rising.

"You're a *bother*," Tommy says with feeling. "And a *moron*."

"Mouthy gremlin." The light of the screen casts an odd shine on his face in the low muted light of the café and Tommy resolutely turns his head to ignore him.

Sam calls the light *cosy*. Tommy shuts his mouth and offers no comment on it even as he has to squint to read the buttons of the contraptions he's been left to juggle.

"Shouldn't you be in school?" Wilbur asks after thirty minutes of blessed silence, Tommy having slowly eased from his tense position only to snap right back as he turns to the other.

It's Tuesday, early school hours, not that Tommy knows anything about that beyond extra patrols in school districts.

"Don't have any," Tommy grumbles when he keeps staring at him expectantly, clearly waiting for an answer.

His skin itches and crawls at the attention, and he'd rather be left alone, but Wilbur can't take a fucking hint even as Tommy keeps slamming them into his face. Repeatedly and with increasing frustration.

"Aren't you like, fourteen?"

"I'm *sixteen*," Tommy hisses, the fingers on his good hand curling tight. "And it's none of your fucking business!"

Wilbur tilts his head, a strange look glinting in his eyes, and it feels judgemental even though Tommy knows it *isn't* because Wilbur softens, something almost gentle in the curl of his smile.

"Working hard, huh?"

"Fuck off."

-

Tommy is getting tired of noodles but after two disastrous attempts at following cooking videos and a limp boring salad that taste of too much vinegar and lost money he resigns himself to it.

He tries not to feel like he's choking them down where he sits, perched on his roof, the wind cold around him.

The first snow of December flutters gently through the air, white against a backdrop of dark buildings with windows light, neon signs blinking and fluttering in the distance at the main streets where life is richer, people more crowded.

A single building stands out among them, tall and marble white, twisting in a curling spiral.

Dream had asked him, on more than one occasion, if he wouldn't prefer a place closer, or even inside the tower, but Tommy had denied him each time. He'd felt more at home in the streets he'd grown up in, the alleyways filthy, the people those society cared little about, starving while the rich people feasted on gold covered steaks.

Tommy had clawed his way out of nothing to stand at the top of the world and he'd lost it all in a single night in a betrayal against the only man who'd looked twice at him, who had seen something in the starved orphan with hollow eyes, teeth bared in a bloody snarl.

Dream had saved his life and Tommy's first instinct had been to bite him.

He hadn't been the Number One Hero then. He'd just been *Dream*, clever and opportunistic, rough hands manhandling him, gentle hands wiping tears from his cheeks when he woke up disorientated in the middle of the night, teasing ruffles of his hair and a grounding palm on his shoulder as he was taught his letters and numbers and then so much *more*.

The world slowly opening up to him under Dream's patient and guiding hands.

On more than one occasion Tommy had looked at himself in the mirror and wondered that if, maybe, perhaps, they did look a bit like brothers. That maybe Sapnap's teasing jabs and George's dry humour had had a bit of truth to it as Dream merely smiled and never denied.

Both blond, tall, eventually at the same height at six foot three, and Tommy had been *proud* as he stood at Dream's side for his first mission.

Red Chaos was the name the world had bestowed upon him, and Dream had laughed as he dragged Tommy down against his chest in a rough sprawl back against the couch, squeezing him tight after their first official mission together.

Tommy had done good and Dream had been proud.

He'd felt invincible, chest impossible warm, cheeks red and eyes bright as Dream didn't let go, one arm remaining loosely wrapped around his shoulders to keep him there, his voice bright as he weaved together future plans.

"I'm going to be the Number One Hero, Tommy. I'm going to change this world and its broken system," Dream had whispered into his ear when he was nearly asleep, adrenaline burning out from his system to leave him sleepy. *"And you'll be right there at my side. We'll be unstoppable."*

Two years later Dream is the Number One Hero and Tommy sits alone on a roof in a dark blue hoodie, grimacing around a mouthful of cold noodles, snow swirling around him and heart impossible empty.

-

Tommy doesn't go looking for trouble, there's no point with the bracelet around his arm, he's no good when his enemies have powers and he's struggling to get a fucking coffee machine to work, left arm weak and taking too-long to heal.

But trouble has always had a habit of finding him which is why, when he makes a right turn on his way home late at night after locking up the café after a hasty short call from Sam who'd hung-up before he could confirm, he halts and stares but doesn't panic as he tilts his head to look up at the Blood God.

The Villain is ridiculously fucking tall, one arm stretched out, the other bent to press a hand tight against his side where too much blood is spreading to stain the fancy white shirt, the pink boar mask on his face rising and crimson eyes locking onto him.

Tommy knows he doesn't look dangerous. He's a sting bean in a too big hoodie that's dark green, a dinosaur bent over to try and reach the oars of his boat with little theatrical tears spilling down from its eyes.

He has no idea what kind of mood Dream had been in when he picked it up but he clings to the remnants of what they were with a childish sort of want in a world that feels large and empty without the man there to reach back and grasp his hand.

Tommy's starting to wonder if he's being haunted by the Syndicate as the ally of the man who'd torn his life apart with his very existence takes one step forward, mouth parting before he quite unceremoniously collapses down on the cold ground.

The snow flutters, clinging to the dark red cloak on the Villain's shoulder, and Tommy drags a tired hand over his face.

"This is a bad idea," he tells empty air.

-

Hauling the Villain back to his place is an effort of sheer stubbornness and muttered curses as he stumbles through his door, shoulder hunched from the man's weight, hand bunched white-knuckled in sleeves to keep the man's arms tight against his chest, his feet dragging.

Thankfully, and perhaps not so thankfully, the snowfall had picked up, covering their tracks quicker than Tommy could make them but leaving him trembling, fingers frozen stiff.

He's never been more thankful for the small shitty elevator of his apartment complex. The thought of having to take the stairs made him want to cry.

Half-frozen stiff he twists to drop the man down on his couch, bending to haul booted feet up with a shove before slinking to his door, closing it and locking it tightly shut, straightening his shoulders with a groan, spine popping and aching.

Blood God is still unconscious when Tommy ambles back into his living room with a bowl of hot water, a bottle of plain vodka, and his sewing kit, a bright green apple clenched between his teeth.

He snaps down on it with a crunch, catching and depositing it aside on the table next to the things as he sinks to his knees and tugs the elegant but sturdy once-white fabric up and out of the belted pants, grimacing at the deep wound at the man's side, blood wet and dark which was not *good*.

Tommy would have been inclined to be more worried if it wasn't the Blood God himself sprawled out on his couch, apparently susceptible to blood loss despite his powers.

He reaches for the rag in the water, clean, because he's not an asshole, and starts wiping away at the blood staining pink skin.

Blood God's powers are strange. Tommy had seen the man take a sword meant for Siren, seen it pierce his shoulder all the way through, his steps never faltering as he swung his axe

to take out the Hero responsible with a crack that had echoed loud in the sudden silence, broad shoulders heaving and grin wide as the boar mask turned upon them.

He's dangerous. The only one who could go up one-on-one with him and not end up knocking at death's door was Dream which had branded him with a *FLEE ON SIGHT* order at the tower.

Tommy wrenches the bloody rag out in the water and wonders why he feels strangely small as he takes a swig of the vodka before drenching a new rag with it, the alcohol burning through him with a grimace as he pried the wound open to make sure no dirt or shrapnel was in danger of being stuck.

He threads the crooked needle and bends over before getting to work.

-

Tommy wakes to a hand pressing down over his mouth, instinctively stilling as he becomes aware of the quiet but heavy breathing behind him.

He'd fallen asleep leaning against the couch, not bothering to do more than wash his hands and trade for a new hoodie since Blood God had bled all over his, the TV muted on some sort of nature documentary, and Tommy watches a bunch of giant guinea pig-like creatures happily threading water.

"Where am I?" the Villain breathes out harshly into his ear, hand lowering to his jaw, coming dangerously close to wrapping around his throat.

"In my apartment, dickhead," he snips. "Hauled your heavy ass here and stitched you up so you better be fucking *thankful*."

There's silence for a long moment and then a shift of movement behind him, hand sliding off his face as the Blood God presses into a sitting position, dirty boots hitting his poor carpet, Tommy's head tipping back to stare up at the ferocious pink boar mask that promises death.

He feels nothing but tired as he looks up at the Villain who stares back, gaze unreadable.

"I would have been fine."

"You're lucky I didn't call the fucking Heroes on you," Tommy snorts. "You were ripe for the picking, fainting like an idiot where anyone could stumble upon you."

"And why didn't you?" Blood God challenges.

And the thing is, Tommy *doesn't know*. He's not a Hero anymore but he lived and believed in what Dream stood for, resented everything the Syndicate wanted to be, but he feels lost and alone, the ground yanked from beneath his feet, a restless boredom as one day counts out after the other.

"*We don't kill, Dream!*" The words he'd snarled out as he cocked Siren's gun at his mentor, hands shaking, heart loud and desperate in his chest, pleading with his eyes for the other to

step away, to laugh and tell him that he *hadn't been about to* that *it's all just a misunderstanding, Tommy. "That's your first rule! Or did you forget?"*

Dream's powers had exploded against him and Tommy had pushed back with everything he had and was, curling around Siren as best as he could as the world fractured and broke around him.

If Dream had been wrong did that mean the Syndicate-

"Good deed of the month." Tommy flashes his teeth. "Easy karma, big man."

A disbelieving huff but Tommy doesn't particularly care as he shifts, right hand pressing down to heave himself up. "Do you have a phone I can borrow?" the Villain asks him, blood red eyes studying him, and Tommy's skin crawls even as he shrugs.

"Yeah." He fishes it out from his pocket and throws it over. "You want something to eat?"

"Heh?"

-

The Blood God looks impossible out of place inside his apartment, the cup of instant ramen small in his large hands, but Tommy had hauled the kettle from his kitchen and dumped the cups down before folding his legs up and they both eat in a stretch of strangely companionable silence.

He's turned the volume up just enough to hear the narrator talk fondly about the intelligence of crows when there's a sudden loud bang and Tommy swears, dumping his cup on the table as he scrambles up.

"You better not break my fucking door!" he hollers as he slides into his hallway. "I don't have fucking insurance you pricks!"

There's a silence as Tommy twists the lock and yanks the door open.

Siren and the Angel of Death both stare at him and Tommy scowls at them both.

"It's three am, my landlord is going to be fucking *pissed*."

"He's okay," Blood God calls as Tommy shoves his hand in his pocket and curls his fingers tight. "A bit of an idiot though," he tacks on as he steps up behind him, a hand settling on his shoulder and tugging him back, head tilting, looks exchanged as the door closes shut behind the Villains.

"We were worried when you didn't respond," Siren says with a spread of his hands as Tommy locks eyes with the blue of the Angel, his dark wings gleaming where they rustle behind him, black as the night, capable of turning into deadly projectiles at a whim.

They're strangely pretty, softer than Tommy's ever seen them, almost like they're real feathers and not a omen of death.

Blond hair curls to frame his jaw, green and black ensemble wrapping around him, that ridiculously ugly green and white striped bucket hat lowered down to cast a shadow over his eyes.

Like Siren there's a mask over his face, covering the rest of his features from sight.

"Who's this?"

Blood God shrugs. "My *savior* apparently." His tone is mocking.

"Next time I'm heaving you into a dumpster," Tommy bristles, tugging out of his grip and stepping back, back brushing against the wall before he turns and leans his shoulder against it.

"Don't be rude," Angel chides and there's a curious look of consideration on him that makes Tommy want to crawl beneath his covers and not come out for days. "What's your name?"

"Tommy," he grumbles, because he has a feeling not answering is a *bad idea*.

Siren's golden brown eyes shifts momentarily to him before his head lowers, remaining a step behind the Angel of Death, towering over the shorter man and yet, he feels smaller, it's in the way the Angel stands, relaxed and confident, self-assured in his power.

The bracelet around his wrist burns like a brand against his flesh.

"Well, thank you, Tommy," the Angel tells him and Tommy has a feeling he's smiling. "I suppose we owe you a favour."

"You owe me *nothing*," Tommy growls defensively. "Just fuck off."

He waits for the other shoe to fall, they're Villains after all, the worst of the worst, the bad gritty seeds of society, everything the Heroes stood against.

But there's a heavy hand scuffing over his head, almost like a tousle, gone before he can do much more than jerk in shock as the Blood God steps past him.

"Don't get into too much trouble," the man tells him before he throws an arm around Siren and leans his weight on the other man to a curse as skinny legs bent, one hand fumbling to get the door open as he stumbled out with them both, complaints hissed to a low laugh.

The Angel of Death remains for a moment longer, head tilting, bird like with a rustle of his wings, and Tommy narrows his eyes into a glare, lips drawing back to flash teeth, all wounded animal and false bravado.

His head dips with a tug at the brim of his hat.

"Goodnight, Tommy."

Chapter End Notes

I've been reading too many hero/vigilante/villain fics lately and this was begging to be written.

I really wanted to see Tommy as a capable Hero in his own right, to see him stand at the top of the world and then yank it all from beneath him. Ah. Messy relationships are my jam.

It's pretty late so I'm just gonna throw this at you and drag myself to bed on that. Hope you enjoyed :)

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The thing about favours in the world of Heroes and Villains is that they *mean* something.

Blood God, Angel of Death and Siren are all gone, his apartment once again empty, and Tommy drags a hand through his hair, slowly sliding down until he sits with his legs sprawled out, head tilting back to look at the hallway ceiling lamp.

He knows it's not a life-saving thing, at most he'd kept the man out of prison, for however small time it would take for the Syndicate to bail him out.

He can only hope it'll go entirely forgotten.

-

Tommy arrives at work early afternoon after a call from Sam who'd informed him that he was opening up late and to come in when he could. He doesn't particularly care when he works, taking the odd hours Sam sends him, sometimes last minute, and had merely asked when he wanted it up and running.

It's not like he's got anything else going for him and he's tired of his mind working in increasingly paranoid circles, unable to sleep.

There's a restlessness in his veins that wrestles against apathy and exhaustion in a combination that makes him pick his nails bloody, the inside of his mouth chewed raw, the band aids around his fingers scraping against his thigh as he flexes and unflexes the hand buried in his pocket.

It's snowing, settling soft and white on his shoulders, contrasting against the deep red of his hoodie, and he shoves the key in place, wrenching it open with a click, and shoulders the door open with a quiet jingle.

He spares a moment to stomp his feet, brushing the snow away before it can start to melt and bends over to shake his head to rid of the drops of water clinging to his hair.

The café is as dimly lit as always, machines quiet, but the owner steps out from the kitchen to greet him with a smile. "Morning, Tommy." There's a green apron around his waist, a flour shaped handprint on the hip, and Fran brushes past him, barrelling headfirst into Tommy's stomach. "Or afternoon, I suppose."

Tommy buries his right hand into soft white fur as Fran keeps pushing insistently at him.

"I hope you had a good evening," Sam continues as he watches them and Tommy rubs down at floppy ears, absolutely not endeared at all by the enthusiastic wagging. "I'm sorry it was so last minute but something came up that needed my attention immediately."

“It’s fine,” Tommy bites out as he untangles his hand, carefully not looking at Fran who plants her rump down and stares up at him with big soulful eyes. “’s not like I was doing anything important.”

“I’m still sorry,” Sam says and Tommy’s skin prickles as the man straightens up, not quite as tall as Tommy but more solid, his shoulders broader, fabric pulling tight against his arms as he folds them across his chest. “Why don’t you sit down and grab a sandwich and I’ll set things up today, alright?”

-

Tommy says no, *several times*, and yet he finds himself at one of the corner tables with a large sandwich, a dog shaped cookie staring up at him from beside a cup of coffee.

He shoots a scowl at Sam who is humming as he swipes the floor, looking comfortable and at ease inside the walls of his small café.

Fran is curled up on top of his feet, chest rising and falling, her warmth bleeding through his soaked sneakers to warm his frozen toes.

“She’s fond of you,” Sam remarks without looking at him as Tommy picks at the sandwich, eventually dragging a piece of ham out and folding it up. “Fran, I mean. She’s usually not all that interested in people but she’s taken a real liking to you.”

Tommy sneaks the ham down and a tongue swipes it up eagerly.

Green hair, golden eyes, splatters of green in different shades. Some days Sam wears a simple black mask over his mouth and tiredness paints dark circles beneath his eyes, but his kindness never falters, his voice never rises, and his patience remain firm even when Tommy’s words are sharp.

Tommy doesn’t know what to make of Sam.

The bell at the door jingles and Tommy snaps towards it, hand jerking up, cheese dropping down into a waiting jaw with a hasty swipe of his hand.

They’re not open yet and he’d double-checked the sign when he stepped inside so why-

“Hello, Wilbur!” Sam greets and Tommy swears internally, ducking his head down, praying the idiot wouldn’t look to his right because he’s not in the mood to deal with Wilbur’s bullshit. “Here to pick up an order?”

“You know it, Sam,” Wilbur grins. “Can’t get the day rolling without some good ol’ coffee and Techno’s been complaining.”

“I still need to clean the machines out but feel free to take a seat while I get to that.”

“You know I don’t mind the wait, Sam.” Wilbur musses up his messy fringe even further, grin endearing in a way that makes Tommy want to throw something at him.

He glares at the eyes that had finally caught sight of him with eerie pin sharp precision and he *swears* the idiot has an in-built sensor for when Tommy's around, his scowl deepening as Wilbur's mouth stretches out.

"Tommy! How lovely to see you!" Sam ducks behind the counter without as much as a look, to Tommy's frustration, and he balls his hand tight in his lap. "How's my favourite little gremlin?"

"Piss off," Tommy snaps but Wilbur is already stepping towards him, kicking out the armchair to his right before sprawling into it as if he had any right to it.

"Don't be like that, I've missed you," Wilbur teases and Tommy wonders how much trouble he'd get into if he was to sock him.

He settles for a grimace as he jerks his head aside.

"Don't let me interrupt your breakfast." Fran lifts her head to nose at Wilbur's hand when the man bends down to scratch the top of her head. "You've barely touched it and I know Sam makes some killer sandwiches."

Tommy hunches tighter on himself. "I'm not hungry."

"You shouldn't waste food," Wilbur chides but it's gentle, somehow, for all that it makes his skin crawl. "Besides, you're practically skin and bones."

"Like you're any better," Tommy scowls. "I already told Sam I didn't want it so if anything, *he's* the one wasting food."

And he *is*. Tommy's stomach is still full from the apple he'd scarfed down on his way over.

"What about the coffee then?" A foot brushes up against his when the man stretches out his ridiculously long legs to avoid bumping his knees against the low table, and Tommy jerks but there's nowhere else to put his feet with Fran's giant mass in the way. "Your ears are all red from the cold, some warmth will do you good."

"I hate coffee," he grumbles, finally looking at the other.

Wilbur blinks at him. "What kind of sixteen-year-old doesn't drink *coffee*? I thought that and energy drinks were your lifeblood. It sure was mine when I was your age. Now it's just coffee."

"Sounds disgusting," Tommy grimaces. "I'll stick with water."

"That's just sad," Wilbur says bluntly before craning around in his seat. "Hey, Sam!" he hollers as Tommy jolts. "Can you make the kid a hot chocolate?"

"I don't want a fucking *hot chocolate*!" Tommy snarls. "I don't want anything you dickh—"

"You're unusually prickly today," Wilbur interrupts him and Tommy's mouth clicks shut, breathing out harshly because- Wilbur's brow is furrowed, head tilting, his gaze searching,

and he drags his eyes away with a rough swallow. “Did something happen last night?”

I helped out one of this countries top Villains, Tommy thinks as his nails digs into his palms. I fed him noodles and we watched a nature documentary together. It was about birds. I-

“Maybe I just don’t like you.” Tommy wrestles for calm when he sees Sam peering over. “Ever consider that, huh?” he bites out.

But Wilbur doesn’t relent, leaning forward, Tommy’s eyes locking onto the dip at the corner of his mouth, something churning inside of him.

“Is everything alright, Tommy?” And he manages to look genuinely fucking *concerned*.

It’s the first time since everything went to shit that anyone has stopped to ask and Tommy-

Tommy misses Dream. He misses him so much that he doesn’t know what to do with himself without the only constant that had been in his life, always there when he needed him. Late night conversations and surprise morning visits, food cooking on his stove and extra servings snuck into his fridge, a hand tousling his hair, arm thrown over his shoulder and cheek squishing up against his when he was pried away from a particular interesting case to get some rest with a soft brush over his hair after he’d collapsed face down in impossible soft covers.

Dream had always been unreachable to the public, the invincible Number One Hero, awe and jealous whispers trailing in his path, the world torn between love and hate for its top Hero, but he’d always been so *soft* when he was with Tommy, human in a way that the rest of the world was never allowed to see, his face always hidden behind that stupid mask with its stupid smile but *never when he was with Tommy*.

Tommy’s apartment is empty without his presence in a way that makes him resentful, TV always on in some miserable attempt at pretending that he was alright, that he was doing fine, that he doesn’t *need* Dream, that he isn’t slowly suffocating and drowning in the silence and emptiness with a hollow sort of ringing in his ears.

And the Blood God, of all people, had shaken that up and Tommy doesn’t know what it says about him that he’d been less concerned with the fact that he had a Villain on his couch than that the silence in his house had felt less oppressive with someone *there*.

The realisation had crawled upon him, settling like claws in his heart, and he feels fucking *pathetic*.

“I’m fine,” Tommy bites out because he *has to be*. He can’t afford to be not-fine. To not be fine is to have a weakness and weaknesses get exploited and he doesn’t trust Wilbur with his stupid charming smile and stupid curly fringe and round dorky glasses and-

It’s not like he can tell him anything anyway.

Red Chaos has risen to stand beside Dream and his mentor had done everything in his power to make sure Tommy was never associated with his Hero persona, often to the point of

isolation, his mouth thin and tight after an argument between him, Sapnap and George, Tommy having pretended not to have heard when Dream slouched down on the couch beside him.

Dream had known anyway, he always did, he knew Tommy better than he knew himself, after all.

"I worry," Dream had told him as Tommy had tipped over to press against his side. *"About you, about Sapnap and George and- I'm sorry, Tommy. That is has to be this way. But there's more going on than I can tell you, as much as I want to. You deserve better than this, they're right, and I know that, and I'm being selfish in keeping you here with me."*

It hadn't been the first time Dream had expressed a similar sentiment, but it had stuck oddly with him then. Different from the times before.

"I don't need anyone but you, Dream." Words he'd told his mentor and friend on more than one occasion when he was younger and Dream had tried to encourage him to go out and make friends. *"I'm fine right here."*

He'd told Dream those same words again and the man had been quiet, slowly wrapping an arm around him and dragging him close, head tilting to press down against Tommy's.

Red Chaos had been crafted to climb the ranks and stand at Dream's side without actually becoming a numbered Hero. A *sidekick*, everything about him kept under wraps, even to his fellow Heroes.

Some might have been resentful of it. Tommy knows he'd been good enough to grab a top ten spot all on his own, it's not bragging, it's what Dream had wanted him to be, it's what *he* wanted to be, and what they had shaped him into together.

Dream had had his face buried in his hands when he told Tommy about their first mission, his shoulders slumped and eyes regretful because he'd been *too young*.

He'd been fourteen, no sane person would have put a child in the rank. But Dream had been under increasing pressure, and between revealing who Tommy was to the Hero commission and officially sign him into the ranks, Dream had made a decision.

It'd been hard. Long nights and frustrated shouting, slammed doors and mistakes that had come too fucking close, Dream's hand stained with his blood and barely keeping him together and sane, nightmares and regret hounding them both. But then, slowly Tommy found his footing, clawing his way up to be someone that could be relied on, his hand reaching down, the one to pull Dream up instead of the opposite, steadying the older as he slumped against him.

"I'm proud of you, Tommy," Dream had murmured into his ear, the rain falling hard, sirens ringing loud in the distance. *"I'm so, so proud of you, never forget that."*

Tommy was *Dream's* and he'd been proud of that, *lived* for it, and he knows he's not coping well with that loss.

He looks at Wilbur and he feels misplaced, like he's playing pretend, because what the *hell* is he without Dream?

Not this, he thinks but he doesn't know what to do with it, answers beyond his reach, because he'd never *wanted* to find out. He doesn't fit in this world of normalcy, wrong-footed and off-kilter, restlessness and boredom twining through him, aching loss and a craving for the heavy pounding of adrenaline that filled him up and made him feel *alive*.

"I'm fine," he repeats again, anger slowly draining out of him, one hand raising to rub tiredly at his eye as he looks away from the man. "Just tired."

"You can go home and rest if you want to, Tommy," Sam tells him as he places a cup in front of him, brows creased in a way that Tommy knows means he's concerned.

"No thank you."

Wilbur nudges the hot chocolate towards him and Tommy grimaces but reaches out to take it, the warmth creeping through his fingers to warm them up, chasing away the lingering chill he hadn't even been aware of.

He glances at Wilbur when the man rises up, his order done, and he finds himself looking into brown eyes, a colour he hadn't even noticed until then, warm and dark in the dim lightning as he leant forward.

Tommy's fingers curls painfully tight around the cup when a hand slowly settles on his shoulder.

"If you ever need any help," Wilbur murmurs, and there's a strange intensity to his words, eyes fixed on his, "you just need to tell me." It's a lull of whispered promises, something Tommy can't have, because there's no-one who can help him, not with this, not with *anything*. "Okay?"

"Why?" Tommy finds himself asking as the hand squeezes down gently, the skin beneath his hoodie burning from the simple touch.

"Maybe I just like you." The corners of Wilbur's mouth curls up. "Ever consider that?"

Tommy snorts, despite himself, and there's a brush of a heavy palm over his hair, not quite a tousle but close enough that his heart aches as he watches Wilbur grab his order, white plastic bag swinging from two fingers as he raised the other hand in a backward wave.

-

The city is quiet where Tommy sits, far up on a tall building he'd scaled carefully in the dark, everything distant far below him.

He's nibbling on his sandwich, a new one that Sam had slipped him after they were done closing, and he admits it isn't half bad.

“Don’t think I didn’t see you feeding the first one to Fran,” the man had told him with a firm look when Tommy had tried to deny it. *“Go home, get warm and eat something proper. Wilbur’s right, you’re all skin and bones.”*

Tommy knows that food is important but Dream, through all their years, had never actually taught him how to cook. The man hadn’t been particularly good at it either, most of the food he made basic, a fair few nutritional bars shared between them during long nights of missions. But he’d made some killer pancakes and Sapnap had kept both their fridges properly stocked.

He misses Sapnap’s food and he misses Dream’s dry, bland attempts at cooking and the way he’d watch Tommy with anticipation when he’d bite into it, all proud when he’d give him a thumbs up.

“You ever wonder if Dream can actually taste anything?” Sapnap had whispered to him one weekend when it had been just the three of them at Dream’s apartment. *“I can’t tell if he actually thinks his food is good or if he’s messing with us.”*

Tommy had choked on a piece of tasteless chicken, Dream ambling back with a bottle of red wine just in time to see him cough it up after Sapnap’s furious pounding against his back, neither of them offering an explanation when they’d looked at each other and promptly burst into laughter.

Dream had looked endearingly confused and then sighed fondly as he dropped a can of cola in front of Tommy with a shake of his head.

Tommy’s attempts at cooking had been charred and burnt, the fire alarm blaring until he’d managed to drag the window open to air the smoke out, swearing as he wrestled it down to shut it off.

The salad he’d made had been bland and boring, then drenched in too much vinegar, and everything had just felt like too much effort after that.

The sandwich isn’t his cup of noodles, isn’t one of the apples he kept at his apartment because Dream had been fond of them and Tommy had grown to love them during the years, amused when he’d listen to his mentor ramble about different sorts of apples, the pros and cons of them, where they grew, what kind of soil they needed for the best growth-

He knows something isn’t quite right when he doesn’t manage more than a third before his stomach protests, curling painfully as he lowers it down, staring at the golden brown bread, the pieces of thick mozzarella and tomatoes layered together over a lush green leaf.

He knows it’s not a matter of *not being able to learn* as much as it’s an *unwillingness to*.

That it hadn’t felt right, words blurring together as he half-heartedly tried to listen to what the man on the small phone screen was trying to guide him through.

Ramen is just hot water. Boil it up, pour it into the cup, stir it around and he had a hot meal.

He'd almost felt good about it too.

He wraps the sandwich back up in the foil and stuffs it into the pocket of his hoodie, curling his hands inside it too, his limbs stiff and the snow thick on the roof around him, melting through his jeans where he sits, feet idly swinging.

Tommy watches as the blaring lights of an Enforcer car sweeps past him far below, the sound echoing between the tall buildings.

"You know, usually people at least wear a jacket in this kind of weather." He jerks, head swivelling around to lock eyes with the Angel of Death, the man's head tipping in greeting where he stands, wings half-spread behind before they fold up properly. "Forget it somewhere?"

"Something like that." A beat. "What are you doing here?" he asks warily.

"Was enjoying a night flight," Angel offers, snow quiet beneath his feet as he approaches. "Your hoodie isn't exactly discreet and when I saw who it was, I figured I'd say hi."

"Hi," Tommy mutters, hunching his shoulders.

"Hi," the Angel echoes, tone lilting with amusement. "How did you get up here anyway?"

"Climbed."

"Do this often?" Angel pursues as he sinks down on his haunches beside Tommy who eyes him.

"I like the view," he admits after a long moment, deliberately not looking at the spiralling white tower that stretches up towards the heavens.

"You look cold."

Tommy lets out a noncommittal grunt.

"Have you considered the favour?" The Angel asks finally and- *ah*, Tommy thinks, *there it is*.

"It's important, Tommy." He hadn't understood then and he didn't understand it now but Dream's eyes had been serious and he knew better than to question it. *"Be very careful when it comes to the favours you owe, and hoard the ones owed to you. You never know when they can come in handy."*

Tommy had saved Siren's life and the man had tracked him down to return the favour before a day had passed.

He supposes it isn't so odd that the Angel stands at his side, seeking to clear things out and get rid of any last strings.

"He would have been fine without me," Tommy tries but Angel merely tilts his head, blue eyes boring into his, and he knows the Villain has no plans on leaving this alone.

He blows out a sigh, scrubbing a cold hand against the hair at the back of his neck before he tips his head back to look up at the moon.

It's bright above the clouds, almost full but not quite.

"Hoard the ones owed to you." The idea had always filled Tommy with a sense of discomfort, which is why he'd tried to deny it in the first place. He's not interested in being owed anything by members of the Syndicate if it means he's even a blip on their radar.

The Angel of Death, power and ruthlessness, a quiet sort of danger in the near silent rustle of the dark feathers on his back as the cold wind brushes past them, tugging at strands of blond hair.

"I suppose there's *something* you can do for me," Tommy says finally, allowing his mouth to tip up at the corner as he looks to the older man who watches him steadily, curiosity gleaming.

-

"This isn't quite what I had in mind." The Angel of Death greets him, his own door pulled open to let him inside, bags dangling from his fingers.

"You backing out?" Tommy challenges as the door closes shut behind him. "You can just keep owing me instead." He steps down on the back of his sneakers, padding on socked feet into the kitchen, the Villain slowly threading after him, so quiet that Tommy barely picks up on the sound of his steps.

"Nah, it's quite fine," the Angel hums, bemusement in the eyes that flicker towards him. "But are you sure? There is a lot of things you could have asked for. Money among it." It's an easy out.

"I have a job." Tommy dumps the bags on the table. "I can't cook for shit though and I can't keep living on noodles."

"Your cupboards are atrociously empty," the Angel agrees and Tommy snorts.

"Just teach me something simple." He gestures loosely to the food on the table. "I dunno, fish or some shit, I'm not picky and I'm not allergic to anything so it's whatever really." A pause. "Something with vegetables, preferably."

"We can do fried rice," the man offers, gaze flickering over the assortment of things Tommy had grabbed. "It's easy enough and you can trade the ingredients out for some variation."

Tommy's shoulders ease down. "Let's do that."

The Angel's eyes flick towards him again, studying him, and for a second Tommy wonders if, maybe the man would go back on his words, that he'd suggest something else instead. It's gutsy, asking a world-renowned Villain to teach him how to cook but-

It's easier than Wilbur, his only other option, because the Angel of Death is part of Tommy's world, the one he still aches for and clings to, powerless and stuck working at a café where boredom scratches at him.

There's a flare of adrenaline pumping his heart as familiar black wings flares briefly before settling, feathers deceptively soft looking, sleek and dangerous, responsible for more than a fair few scars on his body.

He'd kill you if he knew, his mind whispers. He wouldn't hesitate and you have no way to defend yourself.

There's a funny twist to his belly at the knowledge that this man has no idea that he's helping out someone who'd been a torn in his side, who'd stabbed him almost a month ago, and Tommy slips his left hand into his pocket, watching the other come to a decision.

It's with another hum before the Villain reaches to fold up the sleeves of his jacket, rolling up the black shirt beneath it to pin the wider flare of fabric inside of it, and Tommy is absolutely not amused by the strangely domestic picture he makes, misplaced inside his small kitchen, peering around before nodding.

"Alright then, let's start with the rice, mate."

-

There's a lull to his thoughts as he follows the direction of the Villain, hyperawareness of every step and movement slowly shifting into a familiar soft of focus as he's guided through the steps, information taken in and filtered through, sorted with a sharp nod.

It's different from Dream who tended to jump from one thing to the next, his mind working fast, his mouth not always keeping up, leaving Tommy to puzzle things together.

It kept him on his toes, forced him to adapt, and he'd gotten well familiar with the routine during the years with his mentor.

The Angel, in comparison, is methodical, working from point A to B all the way to Z by the time the rice is done, perfectly cooked and yellow from spice before it's stirred together in a pan with ingredients the man had nudged him into picking out, offering advice and opinions as they worked through what could work and what absolutely did not make sense, different spices for different things, healthier options and heavier food for long days.

The kitchen smells of rice and chicken, paprika red, carrots orange, green beans and a diced onion that had turned buttery soft.

It's different and yet it reminds him of Dream, the Villain shifting with silent steps, easily predicting his movement, careful to keep out of his immediate space but still close enough that Tommy's constantly aware of him, heart thrumming as he stares down at what they'd made together.

The man offers no help with washing up but Tommy hadn't expected him to, scrubbing hard at the skillet as sleeves were rolled back down and secured in place.

There's limits to everything and Tommy had pushed many with the favours he'd asked for.

"Thank you," he blurts out, towel grasped in his hand as he turns to face the Villain who raises a brow, head tilting, blue eyes regarding him. "I really do appreciate it," he presses, hoping that his sincerity is clear enough as he holds the man's gaze for a moment longer before looking away, ears tipped red.

"You haven't lived on your own for long, have you?" It's true and untrue. Tommy had lived on his own in his apartment for the last two years or so but he tended to be where Dream was, often at his mentor's place, crashing on his couch or in bedroom Dream had set up for him, and if not, Dream had been *here*, with him.

Loneliness is a new and old thing and Tommy doesn't like the taste of it.

He shrugs.

"It was an unusual favour to ask for," the Angel comments with a shift of his wings. "Some would call it fool hearted, inviting a Villain into your home like this."

"Already had one of you bleeding all over my couch," Tommy bites back before he can stop himself. "Have to say I prefer this."

And, surprisingly, this draws a low laugh from the Villain, blue eyes glittering, an appreciation and consideration that Tommy knows can be a dangerous thing as fingers with blunt nails trails over the brim of the green and white bucket hat.

Tommy is more used to seeing sharp talons, black as his wings, and he wonders how *that* works but knows better than to ask.

"Fair enough," the Angel concedes as he steps away, clearly getting ready to depart, and Tommy shifts his feet.

"Consider the favour repaid," he says clearly and there's a small sharp movement from the Villain's left wing, surprise clear as he tilts his head to look back at him over his shoulder. "It was important to you, wasn't it?" Tommy offers at the silent question. "I helped him and you helped me, we both know he wouldn't have died, so- it's a fair trade."

"You're a curious one." Feet shifts, the man turning to face him fully, hand stretching out and-

Tommy hesitates for only a moment before reaching his own out, fingers curling around his wrist, warm and calloused, his own copying, and he can't see the Angel's mouth but there's a stretching in the lines of his face that tells of the smile behind the mask.

"Favour repaid," the Angel of Death echoes him.

Tommy ends up storing most of the food in containers he digs up from his pantry, an odd mismatch of glass ones that had been left in his fridge over the years, and he sorts out portions with growing size to work up to a proper nutritional scale again, most of them ending up in the freezer.

It's really too heavy food for him, as it is now, but he's optimistic and it feels good, somehow, looking at the containers and the promise of a strange memory of the Angel of Death teaching him to cook.

He serves himself a small plate, just a mouthful really, unable to resist bringing it along with him into the living room, sinking down on the couch as he turns the TV on, flicking between the channels until he finds a documentary on the nature and habits of ducks.

-

There's a package leaning against the inside of his door in the morning and he pauses to stare at it, eyes flickering towards the lock on the door that looks deceptively like it hadn't moved an inch.

He bites down on the bristles of his toothbrush as he crouches down and digs his fingers into the plastic, tearing it open with a rough tug.

The down jacket is obnoxiously red, a near match to his hoodie, thick and warm where it settles on his shoulders as he slides it on, finding the pockets lined with fleece after pulling the zippers down and stuffing his hands into them.

The collar is high enough that it brushes his ears when he sinks his chin into it, blinking at the wood of his door.

Tommy hates receiving gifts but-

He's made an exception with clothes over the years, his wardrobe filled with hoodies from Dream that he wears religiously, taking comfort in the memories, in that it had been real even as the absence of his mentor haunts his steps like a physical loss.

And he's kinda tired of being cold. He'd loved his jacket and he hadn't found it in himself to buy a new one, it felt too much like acceptance of something he wasn't ready to face.

He bends down to snag the plastic, pausing as a single black feather flittered out of it, hand darting to catch it between two fingers before it could touch the ground, bringing it up with a small twirl, head tilting as he studied the fine arch of it.

"Favour repaid, huh," Tommy snorts, straightening out.

-

Life moves on, whether he wants it to or not, dragging him along with stumbling steps even on days when he wants nothing more than to close his eyes and just *stop*.

He searches up coping mechanisms on the internet and buys himself a small potted plant that he names Clementine, the name carefully scrawled on a wooden stick that tilts sideways in the soil, towering over the small green leaves.

He shuffles her around in his apartment, trying to find a good spot, but she usually ends up in whatever room he happens to linger in for more than ten minutes.

No one has to know why he'd picked Clementine out of all the plants that had towered around him when he inched into the store. That- the bright green had reminded him of the colour of his mentor's eyes caught in sunlight, bright and vibrant but also warm.

He's taking it to his grave.

-

He stumbles upon Wilbur outside his work one day, steps halting and head tilting as he blinks.

He... actually hasn't seen Wilbur for almost a week, a realisation that strikes him as his eyes flitters to a dark bruise on a pale cheek, the man's face twisted in an unusual expression that veers from the teasing grins that had become strangely familiar.

He's talking on his phone, fingers picking on the strap of the guitar on his back, not quite pacing but there's a wiring tension in his limbs that reminds him sharply of Dream who was a constant fluttering of motion when frustration crept up on him.

It's really none of his business what Wilbur gets up to outside the café but-

It's not worry, really. Wilbur is annoying, a constant bother, a frustration and pain in the ass that won't leave him alone, no matter how sharp his words get, tension wiring through him, lips pulling back and teeth baring.

Where Sam leaves him alone when he's in a foul mood Wilbur *doesn't* and he hates that a part of doesn't exactly *resent* him for it, not really, not when he spends so much time wishing his apartment wasn't so fucking *empty*.

He can't look away from the bruise, stark, new enough that it hadn't started to fade into that splotchy purple yellow mix that indicated healing.

Wilbur spares him from wondering where he'd take his next step, brown eyes darting up and locking onto him, expression fluttering strangely, almost hesitant for a moment, a wrestle of emotions smoothed out as he quite abruptly hangs up on his phone.

"Tommy."

"Wilbur."

He eyes the older man as he drags a hand through his messy fringe, mussing it up further, Tommy pretending not to see him reshaping his composure into something more familiar as his mouth softens, still strained, shoulders giving away his tension, but an effort nonetheless.

“I like your jacket. I was almost starting to wonder if you even owned one.”

Tommy sinks his chin down until his nose presses against the collar, giving him an unimpressed look. “Says the man in a leather trench coat in winter.”

“Touché,” Wilbur concedes, mouth easing. “What are you doing out here?”

“Why? Is it a crime now? To walk down the street?”

“No.” Wilbur tilts his head. “I suppose it’s just a bit unusual to see you outside your work hours.”

“You haven’t been around lately,” Tommy blurts out before he can stop himself, sinking deeper into his jacket as Wilbur stills.

“Aww, did you miss me, Tommy?” Wilbur takes a step towards him, leaning down to peer into his face with a grin. “That’s so sweet!”

“I didn’t *miss you*,” Tommy scowls at him. “’s just odd, innit? When you usually drop by to bother me. Excuse me for noticing.”

“Maybe we’ve just missed each other,” Wilbur offers and Tommy gives him sceptical look. “Really, child, if I’d known I’d have harassed Sam for your schedule to make sure you didn’t miss out on me.”

“Please don’t,” Tommy balks. “Forgot I said anything at all.”

But Wilbur is grinning now, tension all but swept away. “My grouchy little gremlin with a heart of gold, up at night wondering where his dear old pal Wilbur has gone-“

Tommy swivels around.

“-crying himself to sleep.”

“I did no such thing!” Tommy growls, ears turning red. “I didn’t even realise until I saw you!”

Wilbur laughs, hand snagging around his wrist, halting him with a tug back, and Tommy’s brain clicks off, breath catching in his chest as he bumps against Wilbur’s side, an arm sliding around his shoulders to haul him in for a squeeze.

“I’m just teasing.” His voice is warm, soft, a reassurance that brushes up against his shot nerves in a way Tommy doesn’t understand. “Why don’t you let me buy you an ice cream and we’ll do some catching up?” Wilbur murmurs into his ear as Tommy’s fingers sink painfully into his arm, head jerking up to lock onto eyes suddenly too close.

He’s distantly aware of the way Wilbur’s brow dips, something gentle settling in his gaze, the side of his face bumping against the top of his head, like a cat.

“Come on, Toms.” The arm around him gives him another squeeze before he’s released and a warm palm slides into his, fingers long where they fold through the web of his before Tommy can choke on the strange noise that had crawled up his throat. “I’ve got you.”

Chapter End Notes

Tommy is coping *just fine* you guys.

It's very normal to invite one of the biggest Villains in the world to teach you how to cook. How else will you learn? It's just reasonable. The perfect solution.

You guys kinda blew me away with the response to this and I'm glad you're all having as much fun as I am. It's very poggers to read your reactions and speculations.

Know that I sincerely love and appreciate all of you, truly. I read and reread all your responses and it warms my heart and fuels my writing.

I'm sleepy so I'm just gonna drop this on you and kidnap my dog for a proper cosy snooze before some studying. Hope you all enjoyed and seeya next chapter :)

Edit: Look!! At this wonderful fanart from owlwinter :)

[Learning to cook by owlwinter8](#)

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Civilians live vastly different lives from us.” Dream drops down beside him on the rooftop, shoving a warm styrofoam container into his hands. *“It’s one of the backsides with this work, I suppose. They’ll never understand the sacrifices we make and they take for granted what we do.”*

Tommy’s wrapped up in thick bandages beneath his hoodie and armour, his stomach held together by stitches where the Warden’s trident had pinned him down like a bug on a stick, high on the pain meds Bad had liberally supplied him with.

He’s fourteen, he’s been working as a Hero for four months and the paper is decorated with pictures from civilians who he’d been forced to step in and protect when they wouldn’t head his calls to *get the fuck away*.

It’s not his fuck-up and there’s spots in his vision where a camera had gone off too close where he’d been left to choke on blood on the cold ground when the trident was yanked out of him, spared for reasons that still escape him as the broad shouldered Villain turned his back to him.

It’s not until Dream sinks to his knees beside him that any help is extended, his mentor’s hands bloody where they press down against him, voice sharp and furious over the channel commands.

“We’re little more than entertainment and headlines.” Tommy’s trembling fingers clenches tight, styrofoam crunching, and Dream reaches out to wrap an arm around him, drawing him tight against his warmth when Tommy twists to bury his face against his collar. *“I’m sorry, Tommy.”* His mentor’s hand cards gently through his hair as he squeezes his eyes shut, tears spilling wet and warm down his face, safe in Dream’s arms. *“It’s not cruelty but I know that’s what it felt like.”*

-

Tommy lies sprawled back on the rooftop of his apartment building.

His mouth still tastes of blueberry ice cream and he hums softly on the melody Wilbur had played for him on the park bench, long legs crossed and bumping up against him, all gangly awkwardness and broad smile when Tommy had told him it wasn’t bad.

His fingers are cold from the snow he’d piled together to throw against the man when he’d been a little bit too distracted over the ducks in the pond.

His body is cold from the snow he’d sprawled into when Wilbur straightened up and slowly turned towards him, a strange look that had turned predatory with the sharp edge of his smile,

colliding hard with him to send him into a flurry of snow that melts cold against his skin when its shoved down his jacket.

He's cold from the aftermath of adrenaline, twisting and struggling until he managed to cram a handful of snow into Wilbur's open mouth to an abject look of shock as the man blinked owlishly at him, slowly collapsing back in the snow, looking as if he couldn't believe the sheer audacity of it.

His heart is warm from the way Wilbur had sprawled down against him in the aftermath, breath hot against his neck as arms folded around him, tired laughter shaking both their chests.

-

Efficiency is the lifeblood of survival and it's a lesson Dream drives deep into his heart.

He doesn't know how to apply it in his new existence, where news and speculations about his disappearance are a daily thing, from big front news to smaller columns, spoken out about from his fellow Heroes.

"A Hero isn't above the law, they are the law, and they should be held accountable."

Tommy sits with his legs tucked against his chest, arms wrapped loosely around them and chin resting on his knees as the Number Two Hero slams his fist down on his desk, the windows broad and wide behind him in the tower that had once been his.

"Red Chaos needs to be brought to justice!"

"What are your thoughts on Dream's actions in this?" the reporter presses with a shift of the camera.

The Hero slowly eases back in his chair, head tilting arrogantly, dressed in a sharp crisp suit, horns dark and curling, flaring red with the molten heat of his powers.

"Dream. Funny you should ask. See- he's been on top of this from the very beginning, hasn't he? Trying to scrape his failure under the rug and pretend it didn't happen. No one knows who Dream is, no-one knows who Red Chaos is, and justice was never had. What's stopping Dream from just disappearing one day if he steps over the line as well?"

"You're not implying-"

"I'm not implying anything." Schlatt spreads his hands out. "But the evidence is quite clear, isn't it? Dream and Red Chaos stood at the top of the world, they broke the laws, and no-one is getting punished for it! Is that what it means to be a Hero now? To slip away and face no repercussions when we break the law? Because that's not what being a Hero is to me."

Tommy curls his mouth.

"So, what do you suggest? As the Number Two Hero?"

“Force Dream into revealing who, exactly, Red Chaos is and bring him in. Give him a proper trial, the whole deal.” Schlatt leans forward, smoke curling out from the corner of his mouth with the spread of his smile. “Let us Heroes deal with our failures, properly. Set an example, you know? Reassure the public that we’re ready to take responsibility when the heat gets to us-”

The channel distorts, a small colourful frog making a leap in a slow motion shot away from the fanged mouth of a snake.

-

Danger and resentment, stuck in a world that isn’t his.

Tommy mutters a curse as he unwinds the yarn, shifting it carefully on the stick, counting out the loops and starting anew, sprawled out on his couch with one leg thrown over the back of his couch.

He’s in boxers and one of Dream’s hoodies, laptop open on the table beside him, working through the algorithms with one of his own keyed programs, searching for any mention of Dream or Red Chaos.

Something had gone wrong that night and as the two-month marker inches ever closer with Christmas just around the corner Tommy is faced with the realisation that he has to fucking do *something*.

Tommy’s never been one to sit around and wait for the world to close its claws around him. He survived the streets, he survived his training with Dream, he survived two years as a Hero and balanced at the very top of the world at his mentor’s side.

The world is out for his blood, a restlessness that grows, egged on by the ire of his fellow Heroes, and Dream is stuck in the middle of it all, silent where he stands alone without Tommy at his side.

-

He slams the laptop shut, rising, hands scrubbing furiously through the unruly curls of his hair as he paces over the wooden floor on bare feet.

The air is cold as he yanks his window open, climbing out, ignoring the bird that shoots up and away from him as he scales the stairs of the fire escape until he reaches the metal ladder, hoisting himself up the last bit, nails digging cold into the thick snow that melts against his bare shins as he folds down on the edge.

A crow flutters down just out of reach, a silent company in the cold night.

“I just want to talk to him,” he tells it beneath the moon and the stars, head tilting up. “Fucking asshole could at least do me the decency of *not ignoring me*.”

He’d known it wouldn’t be as simple as *reaching out* but Tommy also knows better than to write off simple ideas in favour of more intricate ones. Sometimes a drop from the sky and a

bat to the face was a far better plan than trying to string someone along with a trail of enticement.

It still *burns*.

He'd barely gotten it up and running, laptop blue screening, which meant that they had anticipated him and gone of their way to kill the connection before it could set up.

Tommy drags his hand over his face, tired as he looks out over the streets below him.

"Something is wrong." He'd known that, of course, but it feels different, voiced into the world in a cold mist of white.

Dream had always been steady with his beliefs, with the rules he'd applied and lived by, trying to set a better example for the Heroes around him.

"*He's alive, right?*" Tommy had been forced from his mentor's side, fingers pressing down and finding pulse on the Villain who lies still on the pavement, in far better shape than Dream whose voice is thick and raspy with choked blood, slowly easing down from where he'd been struggling to get up when Tommy nodded tersely. "*That's good.*"

There's irony in Schlatt talking about *responsibility* when Dream had always twisted himself into knots, picking dangerous routes and choices, chest heaving but grin triumphant when the situation had turned in his favour, blood red and wet where it stains his hoodie and rolls down his lip behind the cracked shards of his mask.

Tommy's never been more terrified than that day, green hoodie yanked up to reveal blood and guts where skin had been torn away, pulsing and writhing beneath his palms as he pressed down desperately to try and keep it all inside where it belonged.

"*You're an idiot,*" Tommy had told him when Dream woke up, gaze hazy and pupils wide in the darkness of his room. "*You nearly died.*"

"*But I didn't,*" Dream had told him, a hand with broken fingers reaching out, Tommy's catching and curling gently around them, head lowering down to press them against his lips. "*You look like shit.*" A shift and rustle of white covers clumsily pushed aside. "*C'mere.*"

"*Your ribs are broken,*" Tommy had informed him, making no motion to move. "*He crushed your collarbone and broke your thigh in two places and your fucking intestines were trying to crawl out of your body-*"

"*Tommy,*" Dream had coaxed with a tired smile on his bare face. "*I'm fine, see?*"

He hadn't *looked* fine. Broken and patched together, concussed to hell and drugged up to his ears, all because he'd gone out of his way to keep the bastard responsible for half of the things alive when he'd begged to go out with a bang.

Justice, cruelty, sacrifice, selfishness, fairness, and morality, it's all words that bleed together in the Hero profession.

At the end of the day, Dream is alive and Tommy both loves and hates the pride that curls in his chest.

"You won't hurt me." Dream's eyes had fluttered, struggling to keep open, stubbornness in the twist of his lips and the glow of his green eyes, and Tommy had slowly inched a knee up, hoisting himself into the bed, curling himself into a small tense ball at his mentor's side.

Dream had twisted until his arm fell heavy around his midriff, too weak to draw him close, but Tommy had wrapped his arms around his mentor's to a low hum and warmth as Dream's forehead pressed against his neck, one knee bumping up against the back of his thigh.

"We don't kill." He's twelve-years-old, he's heard the words enough times that he mouths along behind the back of his mentor. *"That's the first rule and the most important one."*

The metal of the gun is cold in his hand, the Villain warm and still alive beneath the press of his palm, and Dream's powers coils and shifts with a tilt of his head.

"Do you think he'd answer, if I asked him to explain?" he asks the bird that is all curled up, arranging feathers, pausing to give a quick ruffle to rid of the snow trying to pile on it. "I don't think so either," he sighs, brushing snow from his bare thighs. "What the hell am I supposed to do?"

There's too little information, too much he doesn't understand, and Tommy hates it.

-

"You look miserable," Wilbur greets him as he shuffles over to his table, a black cup of coffee in his hand because Wilbur is *predictable*. "Not feeling the Christmas spirit, huh?"

Tommy is endlessly thankful that Sam isn't part of the crowd that play the same dumb Christmas songs on loop during December. Just going through the shopping district on his way home gives him a headache.

"It's loud," Tommy grumbles, shifting his feet, but he takes a step forward and collapses down in the empty chair opposite Wilbur, toing his shoes off and dragging his feet up to curl into a ball.

The man blinks at him, slowly straightening up from where he'd bent down, laptop settling on the table without being opened, head tilting.

The café is empty, it's late, but Tommy knows that even with the CLOSED sign turned outwards Wilbur is welcome here during the late hours.

There's machines to be cleaned, corners to be swept, but Tommy's fingers curls at the fraying ends of his jeans, worrying the threads there as he looks out the window, at the barely lit street and the snow falling daily now, thick and soft where it lands, crowding up on window sills and turning to thick slush beneath the boots of the people trampling over it.

"Tommy?"

“Are we friends, Wilbur?”

“I like to think we are,” the other answers after a beat and Tommy furrows his brows, chewing on the inside of his cheek. “Though I can’t say I’d ever expected to admit to having a sixteen-year-old child as a friend.” There’s a teasing lilt to his voice but an undertone of something else as he settles an elbow on the table. “What’s this about?”

“I’ve never had a friend before.” Tommy doesn’t look at him, one hand creeping into the pocket of his hoodie, the package crinkling as he clenches down on it and pulls it out, shoving it across the table. “Here.”

He peers up at Wilbur through the curls of his fringe, shoulders easing at the clear surprise in the man’s eyes and the softening of his mouth as realisation settled in.

“You got me a *Christmas present*.”

“Don’t expect too much.” Tommy’s cheeks crawl with heat. “I’m not very good at it yet.”

“You *made* it?” There’s a crinkle of paper being torn and Tommy curls closer on himself, not entirely sure what had possessed him to wrap the stupid thing in the first place but-

The bruise is a faded thing on Wilbur’s cheek, a mottled yellow that will fade in a day or two, his leather coat thin on his shoulders and his stupid neck bare despite the cold.

There’s a curl of something possessive in his chest as Wilbur’s eyes brightens warm, wasting no time to wrap the clumsy made scarf twice around his neck, hands curling to press it against his mouth, something Tommy doesn’t quite understand in the eyes that meet his.

It’s dark blue, made with the softest yarn he could find, an endeavour of a lot of swearing and no real reason to keep it for himself, just another distraction and a way to keep his hands busy.

(There’s a lime green one shoved into the back of his closet, not forgotten, just waiting for its rightful owner).

He’s never had a friend before, doesn’t know if that’s what he and Wilbur truly is, but he’d laughed for the first time since Dream, cold and wet in the snow with the man’s weight heavy on top of him, impossible warm despite the freezing winds, and a part of him wants to sink his claws into Wilbur and keep him at his side forever.

It’s a selfish thing, to allow Wilbur even a step into his world, but Tommy’s never been *good*. His moral compass is a twisted thing built and shaped on his love for Dream.

It’s okay, isn’t it? To have a friend. It doesn’t *mean* anything. Wilbur is a civilian and Tommy is a Hero. Or was. *Should be*. It’s more of an apology than anything else, for the lingering question on the tip of his tongue that he can’t get himself to voice.

“*Civilians live vastly different lives from us.*” Dream’s words are heavy on his mind and he remembers all too well the helplessness of choking on his own blood, bleeding out under

curious eyes and the flashes of cameras on the cold street. “*We’re little more than entertainment and headlines.*”

“I love it,” Wilbur breathes out. “Toms- this is *amazing*! You really made it? All on your own?”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Tommy bristles reflexively. “You doubt my skill?”

“Just surprised- but it’s a good surprise!” Wilbur rubs his cheek against the fabric. “I’m never taking it off.”

“Don’t be stupid.” Tommy flushes darker, tucking more of his face behind his knees.

“Now I feel bad though.” Wilbur leans back in his chair, watching him. “I didn’t get you anything.”

“I don’t care.” Tommy wrinkles his nose. “I don’t like gifts.”

“You are such a strange child.” Wilbur shakes his head, fondness in the spread of his smile. “You get off soon, right? Why don’t you swing over to my place after and we’ll watch a movie or something?”

Tommy looks at Wilbur, all gangly limbs and a soft sweater beneath thin leather, round glasses and a messy mop of a curly fringe. Handsome, in a way, with the easy smiles and laughter that rings loud when he tips his head back.

“Sure,” he hears himself saying.

-

Tommy hangs his jacket at one of the free hooks on the wall, tugging his hood up and pulling at the strings that hang from it as he takes a careful step into the house, one ear on Wilbur greeting what can only be his father, eyes darting to peer into the kitchen before he takes a left down the corridor.

There’s a hallway, stairs leading up to a second floor, and a living room that he steps into, pausing, watching the way Wilbur leans down all gangly and too tall, tugging at the ends of his scarf to show them to the thirty-something man that has a book folded away to give his son his full attention with a crinkle of his eyes.

Blond hair tied back in a messy little braided tail, and blue eyes – the man looks more like Tommy than Wilbur. He’s not tall, not short either, caught at a perfectly average height and dressed in a simple black button-up shirt and slacks. There’s scruff on his chin and the most eye-catching thing about him is the emerald that dangles from a thin golden chain in his ear.

Tommy doesn’t remember his parents, but he knows, on some level, that there’s two people out there somewhere that are responsible for his existence. He can’t remember wishing for them, even as a child. The resentment had buried too deep into him and his anger had been a thick dark sludge inside of him when Dream found him.

"I'm not looking to be your parent," Dream had told him in one of the early days, Tommy hunched over with an arm wrapped protectively around his plate, eyes dark and suspicious. "I wouldn't know what that entails. The only memory I have of my mother is of her back as she turned to leave me and my father was long gone before that, if he was ever there in the first place." His mouth had tugged up. "Besides, I'm, what? Five years older than you?"

Kinship, understanding, two boys without anything in the world, a hunger for more than what they had been given.

"Wil, I'm glad to see you too, and the scarf is very pretty, but you're forgetting something." There's a familiar teasing lilt, an easy laugh in the words and light heartedness that Tommy doesn't understand as blue eyes finds him. "Why don't you introduce your friend?"

Wilbur bounces up, making a grabby hand for him, and Tommy huffs a small breath but slinks closer, pressing himself up at the man's side, an arm draping easily around his shoulder, warm where the contact bleeds through his hoodie. "This is Tommy." Wilbur pats the top of his head. "Tommy, this is my dad, Phil."

"ow do," Tommy greets, stretching his hand out, squeezing the palm that clasps his in a firm greeting and getting one back with a peculiar gleam of the blue eyes that studies his face before a smile eases over the man's lips.

"It's very nice to meet you, Tommy. Feel free to make yourself right at home." Phil places his book aside and Wilbur tugs him a step back as he rises up from the couch, stretching his arms up above his head with a crack of his back. "You boys want some hot chocolate? Tea? It's quite cold outside."

"Coffee, Phil." Wilbur drops his chin on top of Tommy's head, squeezing him against his chest.

"It's far too late for coffee, Wil, you're already up all night you damn night owl." There's a laugh in Phil's voice as he moves towards the kitchen. "And I already know you stopped by Sam's!"

"Fine," Wilbur sighs. "Hot chocolate then. For both of us."

"I'm-" A hand slaps over his mouth and Tommy only just catches himself from biting down, instead pressing his tongue wet and slimy against the salty sting of flesh, taking great satisfaction in the shocked yelp as he was abruptly released.

"Did you just fucking *lick me*?" Wilbur clutches at his hand, held far off, as if it was a zone doomed to contamination.

Tommy slips his hands into his pockets, rocking back on his heels. "Idiot."

Wilbur's face flickers, something predatory shifting into his body-language, and Tommy takes a step back, eyes narrowing.

"Tommy."

“Wilbur.”

The man makes a swipe for him, fast, but Tommy is already slipping back, baring his teeth in a grin as Wilbur swivelled towards him, going lower, a quick dart with clear intention, and Tommy twists instinctively, the muscles in his feet precise to angle him out of the way of the wet palm with a bump against the chair behind him.

Just out of reach, a teasing motion meant to lure his opponent to him, one he'd perfected carefully, head cocking in challenge.

Wilbur halts, head tilting, eyes glittering.

“You're fast.”

“Maybe you're just slow,” Tommy shrugs, tipping his body back into a roll over the back of armchair, landing easily with a *flump*. “You said we're watching a movie.”

Wilbur watches him for a moment longer before sighing, wiping his palm off against his jeans. “Gremlin.”

“Tall idiot.”

-

There's a jar of sand on his table, lid sealed shut, light and tumbling with tiny white shells from a pretty beach on the coast of Las Nevadas.

Tommy's never been to a beach in his life. Wilbur has, apparently, been to several – jars with different sorts of sand crowding on the shelves of his room, mouth moving rapidly and with rapture as Tommy listened with interest, trying to picture the places describes and coming up short.

Wilbur had trailed off, an odd look in his eyes when Tommy flicked his up to meet them.

“What about this one?” He'd pointed to one of the smaller jars, the one that now stands on his table.

He thinks that, Wilbur had looked startled, blinking at him with an odd look.

“You don't think it's weird?”

“I think it's so fucking weird,” Tommy had snorted, rocking back on his heels. *“Tell me more.”*

There's sandy beaches crowding on pictures of his open laptop, finally back to normal, and he hums as he pokes the small bits of chicken around in the skillet, mindful of the Angel of Death's cautioning words to make sure it was cooked through.

On the table the small leaves of Clementine stands in a backdrop of the black feather he'd shoved into the pot.

-

“It’s for my contact picture!” Wilbur had wrapped an arm around his midriff, hauling him back and into frame, angling his phone as Tommy tried to squirm out of his grip, relenting with a jerk and a sulkish look at the camera when he was pinched. *“Smile for the camera, Toms!”*

There are no pictures of Tommy that exists but now there is, his face crammed up beside a widely grinning Wilbur who stands half-folded around him, sent to his phone after getting his number coaxed out with a woeful look that had Phil choking on the tea he’d been sipping, the end credits of the movie rolling on screen.

He doesn’t remember what it had been about, hyperaware of the way Wilbur shifted beside him on the couch, popcorn crammed into his mouth and gestures wide, involved and complaining, loud and beaming, sappy with his cheek cradled in his palm, eased back, shoulder pressing against Tommy’s as it came to an end.

He lays curled around his pillow, thumb hovering over the screen and the picture, mouth twisting against the fabric as he abruptly shuts the screen off and shoves it beneath the covers.

-

“Sam! I’m here to bring you my glorious company and-” Tommy glances up from his phone as the doors open wide past-closing hours, jacket already on and sneakers on his feet, head tilting as the person pauses mid-step to stare at him in surprise. “Who the hell are you?”

“Not Sam.” Tommy rocks back on his feet, hands slipping into his pockets. “He’s fetching something from the back.”

A loose blue sports jacket, beanie crammed down his head, a stark scar in a line over a milky white eye, the other sharp on him, studious with consideration and something that makes the skin on the back of his neck itch.

“Huh.” The man squints at him. “So you, like, *work* here?”

“Tommy works for me at the café.” Sam steps out from the back, turning off the light to the kitchen. “Don’t mind Quackity. He’s a friend and he’s helping me bring some things over for the Christmas party.”

“I pulled the short stick,” Quackity shrugs, shoulders relaxing. “And I’m a man of *honour* unlike some.”

“Fundy bailed then?” Sam bends down behind the counter, picking up an armful of the boxes Tommy had helped him prepare, sweets carefully arranged, food cooked during the course of the day, warm and rich in scent at the back of the near empty café.

“So fast, man,” Quackity snorts, stepping closer to accept it, shifting to tuck them beneath his arm to leave the other free. “I think I saw his tail disappear out the backdoor.”

“He’s young yet.” Sam hoists another armful of boxes up and puts them on the counter before bending down to pull up a plastic bag. “I’m sorry for making you wait, Tommy.” He steps towards him. “I know it isn’t much, but I put some food away for you. A bit of everything, I don’t know what your preferences are, and there’s a thermos of hot chocolate there as well.”

The bag is extended towards him and Tommy stares at it.

“You didn’t have to do that.” He reaches out hesitantly, letting the weight settle in the curl of his fingers. “Thank you.”

“Sam’s food is the best.” Quackity is already shoving the door open, the snow falling outside, cold creeping into the small warm café. “Lucky you, getting a whole thing for yourself, man. I’m gonna have to fight tooth and nail for mine,” he bemoans. “I nearly got stabbed over the buñuelos last year.”

“That’s not quite how I remember it,” Sam comments, pulling a beanie from his pocket and reaching forward to cram it down Tommy’s head to a startled little jerk as he blinks at the other, hands lingering for just a moment before the man’s mouth tips soft and they slide off. “Merry Christmas, Tommy.”

-

He sits on a rooftop, wearing a jacket from the Angel of Death, fork caught between his teeth and feet swinging in the empty air, eyes on the wide spiralling tower that reaches up towards the sky.

It’s Christmas.

It’s been two months since Tommy lost everything.

Chapter End Notes

Just to blanket address something because I keep getting comments about it: the explicit rating is for graphic violence, as per AO3 rules. I think there's a misunderstanding in that explicit only means sexual content but it does not so just- I'm aware, and I appreciate that you're trying to look out for me, but while I'm working on this that's the rating I'm keeping. If it needs adjusting I'll do that once I'm at a point where I know for sure :) but it's gonna get gritty.

Anyway! Welcome back to the third chapter of Hush. Dynamics are flushed out a bit and the world is stretching out as we work our way forward with our hero, exploring the new and old.

I'm def gonna swing in some other POVs to weigh things in and get some wider perspective so look forward to that down the line. Other than that, thank you all for the amazing support, your comments are endlessly fun to read and I'm kinda blown away.

We also got some amazing fanart from owlwinter so go check it out and give them some love :)

[Learning to cook by owlwinter8](#)

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tracking down Royal is a *choice* and a good deal more effort than Tommy had expected it to be.

The Number Six Hero, a fancy kingly shroud of a red cloak, hood thrown up, casting a shadow over the golden lion mask. It's not discrete, a far cry from Tommy's own that had been tailored to make him blend in, but not too much, the red of his hoodie stark enough that it had become a signature of his.

It's a decision to wear it, a risk but also a *need* because he has no other way to identify himself, his Hero card slipped into Dream's pocket, out of his reach.

The mask on his face slots up the bridge of his nose, hair crammed beneath a black beanie that sits flat and tight against his head, eyes shadowed by his hoodie pulled low.

Red Chaos clings just out of sight, above Royal who sits with his legs thrown up on the railing of the balcony, screen open in his lap, a low sheen in the dark night.

The door behind him is open just enough to make sweat dampen the back of his shirt at the distant reach of voices, heart pounding in his chest, familiar adrenaline flooding his veins like a heady drug, fingers cold as wind whips past him.

He's lacking his armour, taken away from him along with his powers and ID and the power dampener sits warm against his wrist and yet he can't help the curl of his mouth, sharp with teeth, eyes bright and glittering.

He breathes out quietly, lowering himself down, bare toes clinging to the very thin outline in the white tower, not made for scaling, per say, but Tommy is nothing if not stubborn, his sneakers and socks left at the top because he can't afford a single wrong movement.

He's still far up, out of reach, and he shuffles his fingers down and bends his knees, angling to get a better look at the glass doors and the curtains drawn over the broad stretch of glass panes.

Tommy hasn't, exactly, interacted a lot with the other Heroes. He'd been aware of them, had seen them, several without masks where the public hadn't, eyes darting across their faces because he's been trained to, and he *knows* about them. Has read their profiles, memorized their powers and habits, notes scrawled by Dream who was nothing if not thorough, adding his own observations on long days of nothing.

Royal is a loner and one of the few Tommy had spoken to, on this balcony in particular when the talking around him had become too much, especially during the rare *party* thrown at the tower.

Tommy had never enjoyed them. It was all too stuffy, alcohol in fancy champagne glasses and food he rarely recognised piled on silver plates. He'd only appeared at them because Dream found some sort of importance in it.

Tommy was also fairly sure his mentor took some delight in riling up Schlatt who is all clever words until he *isn't*, alcohol heavy in his breath and internal conflicts in the Hero ranks cropping up in ways the public would never be aware of.

The use of powers are forbidden in the tower for a reason. The internal conflicts are complicated and far uglier than the world needs to know, painted in sharp fake smiles and dark eyes.

He breathes in, steadies himself as best as he can for a scramble if he has too, making sure he had a good grip, and breathes out.

"Royal?" His voice is a whisper, wrangled by the metal of his mask and the wiring in it.

A thumb that had been steadily swiping up on the screen stills in a tell that makes Tommy swallow as he waits.

Royal isn't a friend.

But he hadn't been an enemy either.

He remembers- laughs shared on the balcony, his first bubbly taste of alcohol fuzzy and dry against his tongue, mask lowered and face turned away from the other on the New Years almost a year ago as fireworks shot high into the sky in an explosion of grand colour.

His foot had been broken, the tower near empty, and he'd been frustrated and anxious to be left behind by Dream.

The other Hero had kept him company when he didn't have to.

More importantly, he's one of the few Heroes who hadn't spoken out about Red Chaos or Dream, denying any questions with a silencing raise of his hand and a sweep of his red cloak.

Royal drags his feet to the ground, rising up, Tommy's grip tightening as the Hero made his way to the door, heart loud in his ear as the man paused, fingers curling around the handle and pulling the door shut.

Tommy breathes out.

"Red Chaos," the other greets, his voice a soothing metalling rumble, and the golden lion face turns up to him, blue eyes, he knows, through the darkness makes it hard to see, screen powered off, boots soft against the ground as the Hero made his way back to the chair, giving it a kick of his heel before sprawling back into it. He angles to see Tommy with a tilt of his head as his feet once again found the railing. "It's good to see you still live."

"Out here looking down at your kingdom?" Tommy teases, easing and shifting his grip into something less desperate with a bend of his knees.

“Of course,” the other answers, amusement in the dip of his voice. “You know how it is, keeping the masses in line.” The screen is powered on in the Hero’s lap, thumb pressed down to keep it so, and Tommy’s shoulders eases just a bit at the unspoken reassurance. Royal is willing to listen. “I take it you sought me out for a reason?”

“Straight to business, huh?”

“You’re barefoot and clinging to the wall, it’s not the most comfortable position, I’m gambling.” There’s a beat. “Schlatt is inside.”

It’s a warning, told with a mild sort of tone, and Tommy breathes out.

“Dream?”

“He’s been keeping to himself lately.” Royal stretches out his legs, the night dark around them. “Your disappearance gave us all a bit of a whiplash. Things have been tense here lately.”

“Tense?” Tommy probs carefully.

Royal tilts his head, clearly looking up at him, even if Tommy can’t see much more than the bared lines of a lion’s snarl etched in gold. “People are taking sides. Some are saying Dream didn’t handle things right when it comes to you and he’s not offering up much of an explanation to ease any of the unrest. All we have is what bits and pieces the news are telling us, which anyone in the business knows isn’t very reliable, and a photo of you protecting a well-known Syndicate leader with a gun levelled against our Number One Hero.” There’s a stretch of silence. “Schlatt is spreading unrest, you know how he is, and Dream’s silence isn’t doing him any favours.”

There’s a question there, in the lines of the Hero’s shoulders, in the eyes that still rest upon him.

“He’s always been a right bastard,” Tommy says, unease curling through him, frustration too, because Schlatt, for all that he can be loud and annoying is sharp and dangerous, clever behind it all, a way with words that had the public hanging onto him. “And what do you think?”

Royal lets out a laugh, startling him, fingers twitching where he clings precariously on the side of the Hero tower.

“I might not know you, Red, but anyone who’s been in a room with you and Dream for more than two minutes know that you’re one hell of a protective bastard when it comes to our Number One.” The Hero lets out a sigh that mists in the cold air. “I think there’s more at work here than even *you* know, which is why you’re here, talking to me.” Royal’s thumb taps twice against the screen before stilling. “I’m not much liking this either. Something is wrong.”

“Yeah,” Tommy agrees quietly, mouth curling behind his mask. “Something is very wrong.”

Royal hums, the silence settling comfortably between them.

“So, what do you need me to do?” The Hero asks after a long moment.

And Tommy allows himself a sharp curving smile behind his mask.

-

Tommy stares down at the blueberry yam spread on a toast, fingers idly tapping, rhythmic with the static sorting of his thoughts.

He has an ally. It’s precarious, it’s risky, but it’s a start.

Royal hadn’t been able to give him much, but Tommy hadn’t expected him to.

Dream kept to himself, a distance he had been aware of and accepted, trusting his mentor to make the right choice and pushing when Dream showed all signs of shouldering too much, wrapped up in himself and failing to reach out when Tommy was *right there*.

“That’s why I’m here, Dream.” Burning words, feet planted and chin raised to meet stubborn green eyes. *“Because you can’t do everything on your own and you know it.”*

It hadn’t always turned out well, Dream’s frustration harsh in the twist of his words, fingers twining tight in his hair with a sharp tug as he hunched on himself, a vulnerability his mentor loathed but allowed as Tommy pressed himself against him, refusing to leave.

His fingers burying into short wavy strands of blond, the one to reassure as Dream pressed against him in the privacy of their home, where no-one could see the burden that weighed at his mentor like a wretched thing that Tommy wanted desperately to claw away at.

He knows it had put Dream at odds with the public, an unreachable figure when Tommy found him achingly human.

Tommy had never been interested in the power games in the ranks of Heroes, though he kept a careful eye on what he could understand, listened to what Dream shared, frustration in the palms that scrubbed hard over the bare face of his mentor before lowering over his mouth, thinking, plotting, planning even when annoyance left his mouth thin.

Schlatt had been a frequent problem, and he was turning out to be a problem *now*, his sway with the public because he’s a politician in the clothes of a Hero. What he *doesn’t* understand is why Dream is *allowing* it. His mentor isn’t a fool, he had to know that the longer he let things grow, the longer he let Schlatt wrap his words around the unrest of the public, the harder it would be to challenge and soothe.

Royal had promised to look into it for him and Tommy knows it’s not much but it’s *something* after weeks of *nothing*.

“What are you doing, Dream?” he wonders, elbow on table, dropping his cheek into his palm with a sigh as he takes a bite of his toast.

-

Tommy digs his nails into the wooden railing, struggling desperately to ignore the sheer *noise* around him as he glares down at the blades that scrapes against the ice as he shifts one foot out.

The ice skates are bright white, the metal sharpened at home with a tutorial running on his screen. He'd picked out a pair made for figure skating after careful research, because the toe pick sounded *interesting*, spikes at the very point of them, meant to allow him to do some fancy shit.

He tugs Sam's beanie down further in a vain attempt to block out the noise of the people around him, going round and round on the small skating rink, bright lights flickering on the trees in the middle despite the early hour, Christmas music playing too-loud and scratchy on boom boxes that had seen better days.

He bites down on the inside of his cheek and pushes forward with a sharp motion, knees bending instinctively as he slid out on the ice, breath in his chest like a hiccup as he shifts, trying to get a feel for it as he turns his heel inwards and uses the side of the skate to push into motion, shifting, repeating with his left-

He veers out of the path of a small child, stumbling awkwardly and halts, breath hard in his chest as their parent flashes him an apologetic smile, already tugging the toddler along and away from him.

"You're new at this, aren't you?" Tommy jerks, eyes finding a boy in green jacket with a soft fuzzy lined hood pulled up, hair and brow a duality of brown, face round and soft in direct opposite of Tommy's own sharp lines.

A good head shorter, arms folded, leaning back against the railing with a cocky grin, a thick green knitted hat flattening his hair down to almost cover his eyes.

"Couldn't be me-" The boy takes a single step towards him, with some sort of clear intention, Tommy's lips drawing back-

The boy trips over fucking *nothing*, hands wrapping around Tommy's wrist with a rough jerk of motion that sends them both crashing against the ice, feet torn from beneath them both, Tommy's ass hitting the ice hard, one hand jerked out instinctively, feeling the soft hair of the boy against his palm a second before his knuckles scrapes hard against the ice with a smarting snap.

He stares down at the idiot, eyes narrowing, mouth flattening into a thin line as the other blinks up at him, cheeks colouring soft pink where he lies with his head cradled in Tommy's palm

"What the fuck is *wrong* with you!?" Tommy growls, yanking his hand back and curling his fingers, making sure nothing was broken with a quick flex.

“Hey! You’re the one who tripped me!” The other protests, pushing up in a rough movement only to sprawl back on his ass, legs kicked out and a pout settling on his lips. “You should apologize for that, you know?”

“*Me?*” Tommy demands, aghast. “I did *nothing*. You’re the one who yanked me down from fucking *nowhere!*”

“You were in the way.” The other folds his arms, chin jerking up. “You’re so rude.”

Tommy stares at him, mouth opening and closing because *what*.

“I like your hoodie.” The boy perks up suddenly, leaning forward as Tommy leans back, quite sure he’d managed to attract the only certifiable insane person at the ice rink as a finger pokes rudely against his chest. “Bees are the best, big man!”

His hoodie is bright yellow beneath the open lapels of his jacket, a cartoon bee flipping up its middle finger followed by *otch* in a static scrawl.

Tommy had stared long and hard when he found it beneath his pillow because *the hell* Dream.

He reaches for the hems of his jacket, tugging them shut, zipping his jacket up with a rough tug to get it all the way up to his chin, giving the other a flat look.

“Now, see here, mister-“

“Who the *hell* are you calling *mister-*“

“I’m just being nice to you and you’re being terribly rude!” A tall looming shadow steps up behind the boy who had twisted up on his knees, one hand reaching for the zipper on Tommy’s jacket.

Long arms, a gangly sort of build, a long-suffering look just visible over a black and white split mask as he knelt down, hands slipping beneath the boy’s armpits.

“Tubbo.” The boy freezes. “We’ve talked about this, man.”

Tommy relaxes his shoulders just an inch when the boy twists a pouty face up. “He has a *bee* shirt, ‘Boo.’”

“That does not mean you’re allowed to harass him,” the taller chides, straightening up and hauling the boy with him, holding steady as skates immediately kicked out, unsteady as hands twisted into the taller’s jacket.

“I was making a *friend*.” Tubbo complains and Tommy gives him a mildly horrified look, caught by the taller who coughs on a suspicious sounding noise behind his mask. “*Ranboo*.”

“*Tubbo*,” Ranboo echoes back in the same kind of tone. “Apologize.”

Tubbo folds his arms over his chest and looks away with a huff. “He’s the one who tripped *me*.”

“The hell I was!” Tommy scrambles up on his feet, ignoring the way the tall boy shifts his grip, as if to reach out and steady him as he wobbled unsurely for a single moment, chin jutting out and teeth baring in a snarl. “You’re the fucker who dragged me down like a *bumbling idiot*.”

“Lies and slander,” Tubbo denies and Tommy twitches.

“I’m very sorry about Tubbo,” Ranboo says as he drags the shorter boy against his chest, slouching against him. “He’s a menace but he means well.”

Tommy gives them both the middle-finger over his shoulder.

-

Tommy ends up texting Wilbur, frustrated by the noise, the sound, by *Ranboo* and fucking *Tubbo*, the taller supporting the smaller, an obnoxious cheery wave sent his way every time he passed them by on the tiny round circling rink.

Skates kicked off in the snow beside him, one leg on the bench, hunched over with one hand curled tight around his phone Tommy glowers out at a family that passes a bit too close, caramel apples sprinkled in bright colours on wooden sticks, the girl glowing brightly as a hand ruffled over the curls of her hair.

His phone buzzes and he looks down, brow furrowing as he opens up the location, mentally tallying out the distance since he had all GPS-functions turned off.

Too far he types back. **Don’t exactly have a car.**

Instead of another text back his phone rings with an incoming call and Tommy answers it before he can second guess himself.

“*You want a ride?*” Wilbur’s voice is muzzy with sleep, a distant *thank you* briefly muffled by a finger over the microphone. “*I need to head off on an errand, I don’t mind dropping you off. It will be a few hours before I can pick you up though.*”

Tommy blinks, his tight grip on the phone easing. “You sure?”

“*Wouldn’t offer if I weren’t,*” Wilbur answers distractedly. “*Yes or no, child?*”

-

The blue car rolls to a stop in front of the bench and Tommy opens the door to see Wilbur swipe a heap of paper coffee cups down on the floor of the car with an absent sort of motion, phone open and thumb working over the screen.

“So, ice skating huh?” he greets, screen powered off and phone slipped into his pocket.

Tommy carefully slides inside, cups flattening beneath his sneakers, backpack crammed down between his feet and door dragged shut.

There's music playing upbeat on the radio, something Tommy doesn't recognize, and there's a curl of something ridiculously warm in his chest because Wilbur had actually *come* and it's fucking *weird* but the sight of him eases the uncomfortable buzz beneath his skin, shoulders lowering.

"I'm trying new things," Tommy informs him, sidling his foot and shoving cups away with a wrinkle of his nose. "You know, hobbies and stuff."

He stills as Wilbur stretches past him, tugging at the seatbelt and adjusting the strap over his chest before clicking it in place with a ruffle of his hair. "Safety first," the man tells him before reaching for the gear shift. "Was the knitting part of the new *hobbies and stuff* as well?" he asks with a glance and small tilt of his head.

Tommy does not look at the blue scarf around the man's neck. "Yeah," he admits.

Wilbur hums. "It's fun, it can get a bit loud at places like this though."

"It was fucking obnoxious," Tommy grumbles. "And some rude fucker pulled me down and tried to blame *me* for it, would you believe it?"

"*Ouch*," Wilbur says but there's a twitch of his lips, reaching to turn the radio up just a beat. "Rough morning I hear."

"The *worst*," he agrees with feeling as he relaxes back.

-

It's a forty minute ride to the place Wilbur had in mind and Tommy stares breathlessly out at the frozen lake, blinking as he craned his head around, hearing the birds high up in the trees that towers above them with bare trunks only to pillow tight with green at the very tops, his mouth opening, crispy cold air filling his lungs, heart pounding in his chest.

"What the *fuck*."

"It's pretty cool, isn't it?" Wilbur grins, leaning against the hood of his car, eyes on Tommy as he spins around, a grin blossoming wide on his lips, something new bubbling through him.

"*Cool*?" Tommy demands, turning sharply towards him, an unfamiliar sort of flutter in his chest, a breathless sort of awe that he can't put into words. "Wilbur this is- this is fucking *epic*."

There's snow all around them, thick and untouched, a world entirely for Tommy, wilderness and sounds he's never heard before in his life with the creaking of trees and unfamiliar birds, a tranquility that blossoms out here, away from the tall buildings and grey streets where snow turned to dark dirty slush beneath tires and boots.

“I’m glad I could be of service, gremlin.” There’s a teasing lilt to the words but Wilbur breathes in, clearly enjoying the quiet with the brief closing of his eyes and tilt of his chin. “The snow can be a bit bothersome to skate through,” the man tells him, cheeks pink from the cold and warmth in his eyes as he opens them up. “But considering how cold it’s been the last few weeks you shouldn’t be of any risk of going through the ice at least.”

“The snow’s got nothing on me.” Tommy grasps at the strap of his backpack. “And I can *swim*, you know.”

“You’re a self-sufficient and independent gremlin, got it,” Wilbur laughs but it’s not mocking and Tommy finds himself grinning at him, still ensnared by the sheer wonder of a world he hadn’t even been aware of, head tilting as Wilbur glances down at his wrist. “I need to get going but I should be done in five hours or so? I’ll swing by and pick you up then. You got my number so, call me if you’re about to get eaten by a bear or something.”

“Or something,” Tommy echoes skeptically and then his eyes flares wide. “Wait. There’s *bears here?*”

“And you’re absolutely not going to go looking for them.” Wilbur gives him a look and Tommy carefully avoids his eyes. “*Right, Toms?*”

“Right,” he relents with a sigh, ducking his head because it’s so *strange* to hear the nickname that falls so naturally from the man’s mouth. “You’re no fun, Wilbur.”

“I’m plenty of fun.”

“You keep telling yourself that, old man.”

“I’m *twenty-four*.”

“Old,” Tommy agrees, sliding back, unable to stop the slight bounce of his steps, eager to get out and *explore*. “So very old.”

Wilbur shakes his head, mouth tugging up even as he sighs theatrically with a push away from the car, breath misting white in the cold air, eyes warm and fond. “*Begone*, have fun, try not to get yourself killed.”

Tommy lingers just long enough to watch the blue car disappear down the small wooden path they had come through before spinning on his heel, feet pushing off the very top of the hill and sliding down through the snow with a loud *whoop* that echoes over the ice.

-

Tommy’s first years are dark streets, the stench of rotten food and hands digging into plastic bags, desperate for anything edible with the backdrop of loud cars and shouting from open windows.

It’s cold winters and small fingers digging into pockets of frozen bodies, desperate for anything of use, the jacket of a dead woman his warmth where he sleeps, curled up in a trash bin because it’s the closest thing to four walls, roof and floor that he has.

The world is ugly, a place of desperate hollow survival that beats with the pounding of his heart.

But the world Wilbur brings him to is *beautiful*.

The snow flares out beneath the blades of his skates in a flurry of snowflakes that whirls in the wind that blows harsh on the ice, leaving him breathless as he swerves with it, spreading his arms and letting it press against his back, the sun warm where it casts its light upon snow and the ice bared from hours of skating.

There are patches where Tommy had thrown himself down, wiping snow away and peering through the ice, seeing green algae, stones and fish that flicks their fins just out of sight where they swim with a glittering twitch of scales. Allowing himself a moment to just catch his breath and *bask*.

It's wonderful. It's heady and exciting, things he's only seen on flickering screens brought to life right in front of his very eyes.

It's freedom in a way Tommy has never experienced it.

"*It's beautiful, isn't it?*" Dream's voice is low and content where they sit, side-by-side on top of a tall building, post-adrenaline tiredness settling in and a burrito split between them, bread wrapped in tinfoil to contain the heat of the food. "*The world.*"

Tommy doesn't find it particularly beautiful. It's loud, *noisy*, the people in it strange, the flashing lights bright and there's a system of imbalance, poor and rich, those suffering and those who toasted in champagne after a day of luxury and good food.

He likes it better high up then he does down below on its streets.

But he thinks, he understands what Dream had meant, and why he wants to protect it, as he lets himself fall back, staring up at the bright blue sky and the drifting white clouds high above him.

-

There's a furrow of Wilbur's brow where he stands at the edge of the ice, staring at his phone, one hand rubbing at the back of his neck as Tommy approaches with a twist of his skates to come to a halt.

"Had fun?" the man asks him as Tommy steps back and collapses down on the snowbank beside him.

"Yeah." There's a beat and then Wilbur copies him and Tommy furrows his brows, head tilting as he peers curiously towards him. "You have a braid in your hair," he informs the man as he reaches down, fingers stiff and cold as he tugs at the frozen straps of his skates.

"Techno is home," Wilbur sighs, shoulders folding down as he wrapped his arms loosely around his knees, resting his chin on top of them. "My brother," he clarifies when Tommy side-eyes him.

“Oh.” He pauses the fiddling of his straps, mouth twisting a bit unsurely because there’s something tired in the lines of Wilbur’s face. “That’s… good, innit? Family is supposed to make you happy, right?”

Tommy knows family is more complicated than that. He’s seen bodies and victims of domestic violence, has had to pick up crying children with bruises on their arms and faces, snotty noses burying into his hoodie with trembling fists.

Has had to bodily haul a grieving woman away from her child floating blue and dead in a bathtub, husband dead where she’d cracked his head open in a splatter of brain matter against the wall.

But Wilbur had greeted his father warmly and with open affection, not an inch of hesitation in the lines of his body.

His gaze flicks, for a single moment, to the cheek bare of the bruise that had blossomed dark upon it.

Wilbur hums, one hand reaching out to tug at the small braid woven along his temple. “I *love him* but he can be frustratingly blunt and the annoying thing about him is that he’s usually *right*.” His mouth twists with a wry sort of emotion. “He wasn’t very happy with me.”

“Why?” Tommy asks, finally managing to tug the first loop out and curling two fingers beneath the straps to loosen them out.

“Because of you, actually.” Wilbur’s voice dips strange and when Tommy straightens up properly to look at him there’s something hooded and guarded in the brown eyes that meets his.

“Why?” Tommy asks, pressing his hands back into the snow with a stretch of his legs.

“He thinks I’m taking advantage of you.” There’s a curl of something dark where Wilbur sits, folded on himself, a side of him that Tommy hasn’t seen before but reminds him sharply of Dream even with the brush of brown curls over his eyes. “That I’m being pushy and overstepping and forcing myself into your life.”

“Huh.” Tommy tips his head. “And?”

“*And?*” Wilbur echoes, annoyance drawing up sharp. “He’s right, isn’t he?”

“I can take care of myself,” Tommy huffs, rolling his shoulders. “And he’s wrong anyway.”

Wilbur stares at him with brown eyes intense and focused on him behind his glasses. “And how, exactly, is he *wrong*?”

Tommy looks up at the darkening sky. “See, I’m actually the one taking advantage of *you*.”

“*You* are taking advantage of *me*,” Wilbur carefully tastes the words, cold wind whipping around them, ruffling the messy fringe of his hair. “You. A sixteen-year-old *child* is taking advantage of *me*.”

“I am,” Tommy agrees breezily. “Not my fault you’re too stupid to realise it.”

Wilbur opens his mouth. Closes it. Leans back, long fingers curling into the long hang of his scarf.

“You’re so fucking odd, Tommy,” Wilbur laughs with a disbelieving shake of his head, but there’s warmth overshadowing the troubling emotions, easing the crease of his brow and the lopsided wry grin is endearing. “You- for fuck’s sake child, do you *hear* yourself?”

“Loud and clear,” Tommy snorts. “You’re just being an idiot and overthinking shit.”

“You’re a horribly frustrating child,” Wilbur groans. “I’m trying to tell you I’m worried and you’re-“ He breathes out, shifting to plop himself down in the snow beside Tommy, an awkward curl to his shoulder as he drops his head down to rest against him.

The setting sun glitters against the snow around them, creeping through the paths his skates had made and lightening up the parts where he’d brushed snow away to peer through the ice in patches of glowing blue.

“I’ve never brought anyone else out here, you know?” Wilbur tells him as Tommy’s fingers grow cold against the snow. “I go here when I want to get away from everything, when I don’t want to think, like my own little utopia.” The wind rustles past them, whistling in the trees that sway tall and imposing around them. “I haven’t even brought my family here.”

“Oh.” Tommy’s stomach does a funny little twist, fingers curling into the snow. “Does it have a name?”

“No, but it deserves one, doesn’t it?”

Wilbur’s weight is warm against his side, making him very aware of the snow that had soaked into his pants and shirt and Tommy suppresses a small shiver.

“It’s pretty poggers.” Tommy twists his foot, just enough to see the light reflect against the blade of his skate.

“What the fuck is *poggers*?”

Tommy flushes, turning his head to press his face down against Wilbur’s curly hair. “It’s a good word, shut up,” he grumbles.

“You made it up, didn’t you?” A knowing teasing thing.

“I was here for five hours, leave me alone.” Wilbur’s laughter shakes his chest and Tommy closes his eyes with a small grumble, tiredness bleeding through him with a small shudder and a barely caught yawn. “I vote Pogtopia.”

“*Pogtopia*,” Wilbur repeats, tasting the word, ignoring Tommy’s grumpy discontent as the warmth withdrew from his side, long legs stretching out, rising tall beside him, coat rustling in the cold wind, the glowing embers of the sun lightening up the messy curls of his hair.

Wilbur spreads his arms out in a rustling swirl of snowflakes “You hear that?” he hollers out over the empty stretch of ice. “*THIS IS OUR POGTOPIA!*”

His voice echoes, cast among the trees and something surges through Tommy as he yanks roughly at his skates, scrambling to his feet, at Wilbur’s side as he cups his hands around his mouth. “*OUR POGTOPIA!*” Wilbur’s voice catches and joins on the name, a duet of two very different voices melding together.

An arm loops around his shoulder, tugging him close with a stumble, warmth flooding through him as Wilbur tilts his head back. “*OUR POGTOPIA!*” Strength, charisma, a call that Tommy answers as he raises his voice with him, breathless with laughter as birds scatter from the trees, wings beating dark against the sky.

-

“This isn’t my place,” Tommy informs Wilbur as the door opens, the man bending down across him to undo his seatbelt. “*Wilbur.*”

“You’re cold and shivering and practically asleep,” Wilbur says with a soft voice that tugs at something inside of him as he scrubs tiredly at his face. “My place was closer by a good twenty minutes. Did you eat anything while I was gone?”

“No,” Tommy admits with a grumble as he allows himself to be drawn out of the car. “Didn’t plan for it.”

Wilbur hums, a hand pressing against his back, guiding him to the house and it squirms something aching with longing through him, something thick in his throat as the door opens and he’s nudged inside, fingers already reaching to tug his jacket open and help him out of it before Tommy can as much as muster a thought to do it on his own.

“And no gloves either,” Wilbur clicks his tongue. “At least Sam got you a hat.”

“’s warm,” Tommy agrees as its tugged off his head, his curls flat and wet from the snow that had melted through it.

“I’m sure it was,” Wilbur laughs, a quiet sort of thing as he’s helped out of his shoes before the man straightened up with a brief glance over his shoulder. “Hey, Dad.”

“Wil.” Tommy opens his eyes a bit blearily to find Phil leaning against the kitchen doorframe, a look of bemusement and contemplation in the blue eyes that finds his with a blink. “Hello again, Tommy.”

Tommy tips forward to bury his face into Wilbur’s shoulder with a tired grumpy noise.

“Techno is upstairs,” Phil says with a sip of his tea and Tommy is too tired to try and make sense of the expression on his face.

“I’m cold,” Tommy mutters as an arm loops around his back, steadying him.

“I know,” Wilbur murmurs back, something impossible gentle in his voice as long fingers cards through his hair. “Are you falling asleep on me, Toms?”

He makes a low noise, eyes closing, breathing in the scent that is impossibly Wilbur.

“You really are a child,” Wilbur breathes with a small laugh and a nudge. “Come on, we need to get you into dry clothes.”

Chapter End Notes

My worst enemy when it comes to planning out this fic is honestly the Hero/Villain names bcs. Bruh.

Tommy is getting tired of just waiting around and we're expanding away at the world. Bless. Also some new characters dropping in, huh, would you look at that.

(New POVs next chapter pog).

Your support is amazing, I'm so very happy you're all vibing with me and this Hero AU, you guys. My heart gets all soft and floofy.

-

We've got so much cool art!! My dudes!! I'm just gonna collect the links below, go check it out and give them some love. It's amazing and I'm so, so very soft and happy. Absolutely vibing.

ART:

[Learning to cook by owlwinter8 for chapter 2](#)

[THIS IS OUR POGTOPIA by hiblue for chapter 4](#)

[You Got Me a Christmas Present by lilacadaisy for chapter 3](#)

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy scowls as he tugs fruitlessly at the clothes Wilbur had supplied him with, twisting around in the ridiculously soft knitted thing that sticks uncomfortable against his still wet skin.

The shirt is baby blue and he looks *soft* in a way he resents because Tommy isn't *soft*. He's hard jagged lines, scars spanning across his skin, pink lines just visible at his collarbone where talons had torn him open.

It doesn't help that Wilbur is a tall bastard and he looks like he's playing fucking *dress-up*. Grey sweatpants tied high at his waist and still pooling at his feet where they pull in, at least preventing him from tripping over the things.

"Fucking hell Wilbur, no one needs this much leg," Tommy breathes, bending down to snatch up the plastic package the underwear had been wrapped up in and stuffing it into the small trashcan.

There's splatter of water still on the floor and he drops his towel down on it, shuffling it half-heartedly in a circle before throwing it over the railing of the bathtub for someone else to deal with.

His mouth thins in a grimace and he pushes his hair back with the bottom of his palms before giving up on it and pushing the door open, giving it a kick to close it shut behind him with a resentful huff.

The upper floor is a simple corridor with closed doors and Tommy stares down it for a single moment, brow furrowing, something itching at the back of his neck as he takes a step back and then turns on his heel-

"About time." He pauses, twisting to look back at a now open door, a figure leaning tall in the doorway, shrouded in the backlit of darkness and the dull glow of the lamp above them. "I was starting to wonder if you'd fallen asleep in the shower."

Tommy's first impression of Techno is that the man is fucking *pretty*.

Tall, almost as tall as Wilbur, but lacking the gangly sort of odd look that the man had. Instead of brown curly hair there's long sleek pink hair braided into a tail that falls over his shoulder, stray hair curling behind sharp tipped ears that glint with golden jewelry, glasses square in front of maroon eyes that regard him with a small tipping of his head.

There's something put together about him, a calm sort of confidence in the way he stands, dressed in a simple white poet shirt rolled up to his elbows to bare a simple golden bracelet.

In his ear, captured in a folding of gold, is an emerald.

Dangerous, something whispers at the back of his mind, neck itching, but he can't place the feeling and there's nothing recognizable about the man who stands in front of him.

"You're Wilbur's brother," he says, scrutinizing the other as he slips his hands into the pockets of the grey sweatpants. "Techno, right?"

"And you're Tommy." There's a small curving smile, revealing sharp top and bottom canines, and Tommy thinks *oh*, shoulders lowering just an inch, rolling on his feet with a cocking of his head, wariness traded out for curiosity with a blink.

Hybrid, likely a mob one if the flush of adrenaline in his veins had anything to say about it. He'd had the same response to Sam, something that had, inevitably, piqued his curiosity and drawn him back to that small café. But there's very little else to distinct *what* exactly the man is. There's no skin discoloration and sharp teeth and ears could mean a number of things, likely a distant thing back in the family tree that had flared up.

Not terrible unusual. Hybrids aren't rare, exactly, it was one of the more usual quirks that popped up in horns and tails, splatters of colours and shifting eyes, drastic cases rare but not impossible.

Mob hybrids were far rarer but if Sam didn't have creeper blood Tommy would eat his fucking left foot.

There were speculations about the Blood God being a full blood piglin, or at least close to one, with his broad shoulders and pink skin, tusks jutting sharp and dangerous from his bloodthirsty smile.

"So, Wil brought you here?" Techno pushes away from the doorway and straightens up, hands in his pockets. "I thought he would. He's never been good at staying away, even if it's for the better."

"Better for who?" Tommy challenges. "Wilbur's my friend, I don't much appreciate someone trying to warn him *away*, even if it's family."

There's a hum, consideration in the eyes that rest on him. "Let's get one thing clear between us, *Tommy*." Techno steps towards him and Tommy shifts carefully on his feet, back pressing against the wall with a tilt of his head as the man stops in front of him, leaning forward, stray strands of pink hair framing his jaw. "If you hurt Wil we're gonna have a problem, you understand me?"

And perhaps it should be off-putting, Tommy thinks, looking into those eyes, such a strange shade of brown that they seem almost red.

But there's a heady sense of exhilaration crawling up through him, all sense of tiredness bleeding out with the pounding of adrenaline that makes his mouth curve sharp and jagged with a hooded glimmer of his blue eyes as he tilts his chin.

“Wilbur is my friend,” Tommy tells him and a sort of dark amusement flares in the man’s eyes, predator and prey regarding each other. “I’m not gonna fucking hurt him.”

“Perhaps not intentionally,” Techno says with a look that keeps him locked in place. “But here’s some advice from me to you.” The man tilts his pretty face, long elegant fingers rising to brush a thumb over the side of his jaw. “Pretending everything is fine... it only gets you so far. Sooner or later things catch up to you.”

“What the fuck is that supposed to mean?” Tommy scowls, hyperaware of the simple touch and the power dampener that rests warm against his wrist, warning him from anything stupid.

“I think you know exactly what I mean,” Techno says in a low voice. “You’re hiding something.”

“Everyone is hiding something, dickhead,” Tommy bristles. “It’s called having a fucking *life* and I don’t need idiots prying into it. I’m fucking *fine* so you can shove your concerns into whatever hole you dug them out of to harass me with.”

Techno shifts slowly back, ridiculously elegant in that single motion. “You’re mouthy.”

“And you’re a fucking bitch,” Tommy snorts, grinning despite himself.

-

“Your brother is an asshole,” he informs Wilbur as he steps into the kitchen, ignoring Phil who coughs on his sip of tea. “I can see how you’re related.”

Wilbur blinks owlishly at him from where he's leaning against the kitchen table.

“You spoke with Techno?” There’s a dipping of his tone, fingers curling to beckon him closer, and Tommy slides closer with a glance at Phil who has turned back to stir the food. “What did he say?”

“I don’t speak *idiot* so hell if I know,” Tommy mutters as fingers tug at his wet hair and Wilbur lets out a startled laugh, sliding his hands properly through the wet strands to comb them out of his face before cradling his cheeks and pressing their foreheads together with a soft bump.

“Never change you little gremlin,” he murmurs, eyes soft and glittering fondly. “Also, you look ridiculously adorable.” He’s pressed back, hands sliding to his shoulders, tugged around in a circle. “Blue suits you,” Wilbur decides with a satisfied little curl of his lips.

“I hate it,” Tommy says flatly. “Also, your legs are too long. It’s fucking ridiculous.”

“Kid’s got you pegged,” Techno says with a drawl as he slides into the kitchen. “Tall and ridiculous.”

“Oh fuck off,” Wilbur huffs but there’s no real bite to the words, head tilting to look at his brother. “I thought you weren’t planning on coming home tonight.”

“Plans change,” Techno says loftily as he leans down to accept the small spoon Phil offers to him. “Could use some more spice,” he says, tongue flattening against the metal to swipe up the last of the curry as he turns to look at Tommy. “That is, if you can handle it.”

“No thank you,” Tommy says flatly. “Been there done that, I’m not burning a hole in my stomach for your amusement.”

“Play nice, boys” Phil laughs, still with that easy soft of thing that makes Tommy look away uncomfortably with a scowl. “If you want more spice you can add it once it’s on your plate, Techno.”

There’s only a hum in response.

Tommy’s eyes darts between them, at the braid that tangles at Wilbur’s temple, at the short thing at Phil’s neck, and the long elegant thing that hangs off Techno’s shoulder in soft pink.

Family, he thinks with something strange curling in his chest, dark and prickling.

-

“So, who’s your favourite Hero, kid?”

Tommy looks up from his curry with a quirk of his brow as there’s a scuffed noise of a foot colliding hard with an ankle.

Techno’s face doesn’t as much as twitch, Wilbur looks severely unimpressed, and Phil looks serenely content to not interfere as he eats his food while scanning over his phone.

“None of your business, innit?” he decides, just to be a shit about it. “Why?”

“Just making conversation. Isn’t Heroes all that kids talk about these days?” Techno drawls, biting down on his way-over spiced food without as much as a twitch of his face.

“The fuck would I know,” Tommy snorts. “I’m not a fucking kid.”

Wilbur gives him a look. “You *are* a child, Tommy.”

“No, you’re just fucking old as dirt, that’s not my problem,” Tommy scowls at him. “Don’t shove your issues on me, dickhead.”

“If I’m old as dirt I despair to know what you think of Phil,” Wilbur sighs with a wry sort of amusement as Phil pauses to flick his eyes up.

“He was probably roaming with the dinosaurs,” Tommy says after only a beat of hesitation. “It’s a fucking wonder he’s still breathing.”

“... I’m thirty-five?” Phil stares at him. “What?”

“*Old*,” Tommy agrees before he swings his attention over at Techno. “I guess if I had to pick one, I’d say Valorant because you *really* can’t go wrong with arson.”

Wilbur blinks at him. “Arson?”

“Not Dream?” Techno raises a brow. “He’s the Number One, isn’t he?”

“He’s a dickhead,” Tommy scowls. “Don’t tell me you’re some Dream *fanboy*.” Techno stares at him and Tommy pauses, backtracking. “I mean, I guess it’s *fine* if you are, the whole masked Hero thing is pretty cool, if you think about it, like- all mysterious and shit. So as long as it’s not like a *fetish* thing-“

“*Toms*.”

“-I guess it’s fine if you have, like, a crush and stuff, you know?”

Techno is still staring at him, looking vaguely pained, while Wilbur has sunken his mouth beneath his palm and Phil’s mouth is twitching, valiantly turned away to hide it.

“I mean, you could have picked a worse Hero to crush on,” Tommy finishes with an awkward cough. “Sorry if it was like, a secret or something,” he mumbles, grasping for his spoon and shoving a heap of rice and curry into his mouth.

“You’re just digging a deeper hole, Toms,” Wilbur half-giggles beneath his palm before reaching out and patting his brother’s shoulder. “Don’t worry, we fully support you, Tech.”

“I don’t have a *crush* on *Dream*,” Techno breathes out, pinching the bridge of his nose.

“Okay,” Tommy agrees simply.

“I *don’t*.”

“I’m not disagreeing!” he protests. “I was just *saying*.”

“Say less,” Techno groans. “I thought you were exaggerating when you called him a gremlin, Wil.”

Wilbur shrugs his shoulders before swinging to Tommy with a pointed look. “About that *arson*-“

-

Wilbur’s family is odd.

There’s a dynamic at work, something strong, like a solid foundation beneath the bickering and teasing, a warmth that makes his own fingers curl tight into the fabric of his sweatpants beneath the table.

It’s easier if he pretends Phil isn’t there because the way Techno and Wilbur bicker between each other is *familiar* and Tommy is running on pure adrenaline that he clings tooth and nail too, his smile just a tad too sharp, a creeping of mania deep in his chest alongside something darker and uglier that flares as Wilbur laughs.

He's spiraling towards a crash after too many sleepless nights, his meeting with Royal, the cold that clings to his bones after hours of skating despite the warmth of the shower and the heady rush of a world that feels unreal and distant here inside four walls and a laughing family.

I miss Dream. Tommy's stomach twists and he drops his spoon, scrubbing a tired palm over his face with a furrow of his brow as one hand clenches and unclenches the grey fabric. *What am I doing? I should-*

"Toms?" He jerks, fingers curling tight around a wrist, fingers inches from touching his face and-

Wilbur is looking at him, head tilted, worry creasing his features, and Tommy's breath is loud in his ears alongside the pounding of his heart.

The swallow he forces is dry in his throat as he works sense back into his body with a loosening tension of his shoulders and a careful flexing of his fingers around a wrist that remains carefully still.

"Sorry." He releases Wilbur's hand with a grimace. "I'm done," he tacks on to direct the attention elsewhere.

"That's okay," the man says softly and Tommy gives him a wary glance. "Want to watch a movie?" Wilbur suggests with a contemplative sort of look. "Something fun."

"I-" Tommy breathes out harshly. "Sure, yeah. Movie is good."

He carefully doesn't look at the other two at the table as he slides off the chair, his heart pounding with an aching for *greengreengreen* even as he reaches out blindly to curl his hand into Wilbur's sweater, gripping it tight.

-

Wilbur slouches back on the couch, keeping one eye on the child as his eyes droops beside him, jerking to stay awake with a grimace and rough pawing of his eyes that makes him look impossibly like a drowsy kitten.

He can't resist reaching out when it happens for the fifth time, shifting to wrap an arm around shoulders that tenses tight as he draws him gently closer, fingers curling to brush against the bunched muscles in Tommy's jaw as blue eyes flicks towards him, exhaustion and emotions tangling together in those bright blue eyes.

"I've got you," Wilbur reminds him with a soft murmur, aware of the way Techno's gaze flicks towards him from his armchair.

Tommy wavers for just a moment before he twists away from the television screen and Wilbur stills in surprise as he pushes up on his knees before he tips forward and buries his face into the collar of his shirt, fingers bunching tight into his sweater, clawing down with an aching sort of desperation.

Oh, Wilbur thinks, and then he shifts his body, looping his arms around Tommy to drag him along until he's resting in a half-sprawl back against the armrest, long legs shifting to make space for the boy between them as he presses against him with a full-body shiver.

It's curious to see the way those wary shoulders loosen their tension as minutes pass by, Wilbur's fingers finding their way into messy little cowlicks to scratch against the boy's scalp, feeling the way fingers relax into something less desperate where they hold onto him but remaining tight even as the last crease smooths out on his face.

He breathes in and out, Tommy snuffling closer in his sleep, head bumping up against the underside of his chin, legs twisting to trap him with a warm exhale against his throat.

"Wil."

"Not a word, Technoblade," Wilbur tells him as he draws the boy tighter against him, curling back a soft coo at the absolutely adorable picture Tommy makes, something tight in his chest. "I tried to tell him--"

"*Wil*," his brother interrupts with a furrow of his brow, jewelry clinging gently as he shifts, elbow on the armrest, fingers spreading out to support his chin. "He's not a stray cat to be kept and we still don't know anything about him."

"I know." Wilbur sinks his teeth into his lip. "Tech, I *can't* leave him alone. I found him." Wilbur can feel his brother's eyes on him and he can't help the way he draws the boy protectively against his chest before he buries his nose into blond curls. "Mine now."

"You're not going to let him go, are you?" Techno's brow knits tight before he lets out a sigh. "This is exactly why I tried to warn you. You- we still need to know more. He's a walking, talking security risk and you've invited him right into our *home*."

Wilbur drags a finger over a stubborn cowlick in the boy's hair, watching it spring right up.

"... And I'm being ignored. Wonderful. Phil-" Techno turns to their father who pauses, glancing up from his book with a flicker of blue eyes. "You can't tell me you're fine with this."

"Worst come to worst, we'll deal with it." Phil says after a long moment, leaning back with a roll of his shoulders. "Together," he adds under his son's unimpressed look. "Wil's twenty-four, I can't exactly control who he makes friends with."

"That kid is two steps away from crashing in a most spectacular way," Techno says flatly. "I can't believe I'm the only one thinking rationally about this."

"Someone hurt him."

"Someone *trained* him," Techno says sharply, mouth curling with a flash of sharp canines. "You have no idea where that kid's loyalties lie."

Wilbur tucks his jaw on top of blond curls with a narrowing of his eyes. "He's so fucking touch-starved, Tech." Frustration wraps through him. "I see him at Sam's and it's just

miserable. He's trying so hard, so *fucking hard*, but he's showing every sign of having been heavily codependent or someone who just fucking *left him*." He meets his brother's steady gaze. "He's a good kid."

"And why, exactly, do you think he's clinging to *you*, Wil?" Techno's face twists and Wilbur knows he regrets the words even as he breathes out a low frustrated noise, hand dragging over his face as he leans back heavily. "You're doing neither of you any favours. I'm- I'm *worried*," he bites out and Wilbur's chest twists with a small pang of guilt even as his arms wraps tighter around the boy.

"You're not one to let people in," Phil says after a long-traded look with Techno who looks away with a dismissive huff. "I've never seen you take to anyone like you've taken to Tommy, not since you were a child." His father's eyes are soft, gentle and so understanding when Wilbur looks to him. "I want to see you happy, Wil. You've been withdrawn for *months* now but that boy- he brought your laughter back." A wry twist of his lips. "Perhaps it was selfish of me to let it go this far but I can't regret it."

"We don't involve children in the business," Techno says tiredly and with resignation. "There's a *reason* we keep both Tubbo and Ranboo out of it and he's younger than both of them."

"No one is sayin' we're involving him in the business, Tech," Phil stretches his arms up above him with an arch of his back before slumping back with a motion befitting the Angel of Death with the curl of his smile. "I agree, kids stay out of it, and he's very clearly one. But-" He looks to Wilbur again. "He's interesting, isn't he? I can't help but be curious what he's hiding under those ruffled feathers."

"... This is because he asked you to teach him how to cook, isn't it?" Techno says just a tad despairingly. "Don't think I didn't see the red jacket in the hallway, *Philza*, I watched you wrap it."

"It was pretty funny, mate." Phil scratches at the scruff on his jaw with a laugh. "And he looked cold."

"Sam pays him well enough for him to buy his own, you mother hen." Techno tips his head into the palm of his hand, eyes settling on the boy for a long moment. "... I suppose he isn't the worst kid you could have picked up." Wilbur perks up, hopeful as he looks to his brother who firms his jaw. "If what Sam is doing right now isn't getting us anywhere-"

"It *isn't*," Wilbur nods.

"-then we'll just have to step in." Techno gives him a look that softens at Wilbur's own cautious one. "If you can't step back that means you're compromised, and I can't let you deal with it on your own."

Wilbur's eyes widens. "*Techno*-"

"Not a word," his brother groans, turning away with a crawl of a pink flush. "I'm not *soft*, shut up Chat."

“What Techno means it that you have our support in this, Wil,” Phil laughs, eyes warm as he looks with pride upon them both. “I’ll talk to Sam, sort things out, make sure the right people know that he’s under our protection for now.”

“He’s not gonna be happy,” Wilbur cautions even as his chest blossoms warm. “He likes the gremlin.”

“All the better for Tommy then, he clearly needs a good support network,” Phil muses. “I still think you should keep Techno’s words in mind, be cautious, just until we know what we’re dealing with here. He could just be a street kid who fell in bad company-“

“He’s too clever,” Wilbur interrupts with a brief grimace as Phil quirks a brow. “I don’t mean that in a demeaning way, Dad, promise. He’s- I used to bug him about things while working at the café and he *knows* stuff and then he’ll surprise me about the absolute lack of knowledge on some other topic.” He frowns. “I asked him what his favourite class was in school and he told me it was *the nature shit*. I actually don’t think he’s been to school, he had no idea what *recess* was when I asked what he used to do during them, he just stared at me, and then the next thing I know he’s rattling off the answer to a college level math question with barely a glance.” Wilbur touches against a pink scar just barely visible on the inside curve of Tommy’s ear. “He’s a smart kid but it’s... odd.”

Phil hums. “Something else then.” A pause. “I think I make him uncomfortable, it’s a shame.” His head tilts. “He was more relaxed around me as the Angel of Death.”

“You think he might be from another gang? It would explain why he helped you, Tech.”

“We’re not a *gang*, Wil.” Techno bares his teeth, eyes flaring vivid red. “We’re anarchy and revolution.”

“*Villains*,” Wilbur corrects even as chest eases, here with his family and the strange feral child that had stumbled into his life.

“Sometimes the world disagrees,” Techno snorts, eyes glimmering. “I can’t believe people are clamoring for *Schlatt* to come save them, it’s absurdity at its finest.” He rolls his neck, eyes momentarily at the ceiling as he mulls it over before they drift back to Wilbur. “But, maybe? It’s hard to tell. He’s *issues*.”

“He called you an asshole,” Wilbur murmurs into soft blond hair, tugging absently on one of the locks of hair that had been growing since he first saw the boy, mulish and aggressively stubborn in his sharp words.

“Because I was one,” Techno shrugs, unconcerned. “Kid’s got a mouth on him.”

“He’s eloquent, isn’t he?” There’s a strange sort of pride in his chest, perhaps undeserved but there all the same. “Especially when he gets all *prickly*.”

“He’s protective,” his brother huffs and Wilbur tilts his head curiously at the grudging approval in his voice. “Said he *didn’t appreciate someone warning you away, even if it’s family*.” Techno’s look is dry. “He’s attached to you.”

Wilbur hums, ignoring the dark pleased curl in his chest as he breathes in the scent of flowers, noting with some amusement that the gremlin had gone right for Techno's expensive shit.

"I really didn't expect to come back to this," Techno sighs, eyes closing shut, a vulnerability so rarely shown but allowed here because they're family. "When Phil said you'd adopted a kid I thought he was kidding."

"He's a cute child?" Wilbur offers with a gentle brush and scratch that makes the boy burrow closer even in sleep, which, *fucking adorable*.

"Sure," Techno agrees with a scoff. "*Cute*."

-

Sam rubs a hand against the back of his neck, breathing out a sigh as he unlocked his apartment, Fran pushing the door open to slip inside with an increased wagging of her tail as she made a beeline for his couch and the people in it.

"Sam!" Quackity grins at him, head tipped back, seated on the floor and half-leaning back against the knee Niki had folded up in support. "My man, you're *late*."

"Hi, Sam," Niki greets with a small smile, laptop casting her face in a bright light.

"I take it you have news." Sam places his shoes aside and hangs his jacket on a free hanger, reaching for his beanie before remembering he'd given it away and dragging a distracted hand through his hair. "Where's Technoblade?"

"Got caught up in family business," Quackity informs him with a sharp smile even as his fingers disappear into white fur to scratch against soft ears. "Apparently Wilbur's gone and gotten attached to your kid- Tommy, was it?"

Sam pauses at that, brow creasing. "I know they've been talking."

He looks to Niki who offers a small shrug. "It's hard to tell what Wilbur's thinking sometimes but- Tommy's all he's been talking about lately." She reaches up to tuck a stray strand of pink behind her ear. "Wil's... intense." It's an understatement. "But I think he genuinely likes Tommy?"

"I see," Sam says heavily, not sure what to feel about it. "Tea?"

"I'll get it." Quackity shoots to his feet, sliding towards the kitchen before Sam can make a move, Fran at his heels. "You might want to sit down for this- we've got a problem on our hands."

"A problem?"

Niki closes her laptop down, mouth creasing thoughtfully. "Not necessarily a problem," she corrects finally as Sam sinks down in one of the free armchairs. "At least not yet."

There's a rustle of china from the kitchen and it's not long before Quackity returns, moving easily despite Fran doing her absolute best to be a nuisance, and he slides a tray in place on the low wooden table before collapsing back on the floor, one hand swiping over his beanie to adjust it.

Sam leans forward to grab the nearest cup and Quackity passes Niki hers to a murmured *thank you*.

"I'll get straight to business." Quackity's gaze is sharp, fingers curling around his cup as he rests one elbow against his raised knee. "Red Chaos is back."

Sam straightens out before leaning forward, brow furrowing as he rests his arms against his knees. "You're certain?"

"Very." Niki's nails taps against her cup before stilling. "We still don't know much but apparently he's looking into the Dream situation."

"I thought for sure he'd bailed, that's what I would have done." Quackity gives a small shake of his head, grimly amused. "Mans gotta be aware that he's got people on both sides looking for him and he lost all sense of public support when he was denounced as a Hero."

"He's loyal," Niki tilts her head. "I'm surprised he stayed away for so long, to be honest."

"Even after that whole shit show?" Quackity asks disbelievingly. "If Techno pointed a gun at me and told me to scram I for sure wouldn't be back."

"There's no person closer to Dream than Red Chaos." Sam stares down into his tea, pretending not to notice when Quackity sneaks Fran a treat from his pocket to a low *thump-thump-thump* of her tail against the couch. "If he's returned despite the fact that Heroes and Villains alike are looking for him, that's... concerning."

"That's putting it mildly," Quackity snorts, eyes hooded as he leans back. "It begs the question as to what the hell Dream is all tangled up in. And on top of that, we have *Schlatt* to concern ourselves with!" His mouth curls sharp with vivid hatred. "Nothing good ever comes out of that man being involved."

"Dream hasn't made a public appearance in over a month," Niki adds. "He's doing nothing to reassure the public and things are getting more and more uneasy. There's only so much damage control the Syndicate can do."

"I like Dream as much as the next Villain," Quackity huffs. "But even I'll admit things have been better with him as the Number One."

"What are the orders?" Sam asks as he places his cup down on the table before easing back.

"Keep an eye on things for now," Niki says with a small shrug. "Red Chaos is... good at staying under the radar. We still have no idea of his identity or anywhere to start with him." Her head tips. "He saved Wil's life, the Syndicate won't ignore that, but this is larger than Red Chaos and Dream's personal business."

“It’s a bit of delicate situation,” Sam muses. “We can’t risk possibly antagonize Dream by going after Red Chaos, unless we have to, but the situation is too volatile to be left alone.” His brow furrows. “Has Wilbur spoken about what happened that night?”

Niki shakes her head. “Just that Red Chaos saved his life. He gets all closed-up when I try to pry further.”

“It’s odd,” Sam sighs, rubbing a hand against the stiff muscles at the back of his neck. “Dream’s been firm on his no killing stance since he first made the ranks. I don’t understand why that would change so suddenly.”

“Something is fucked-up in the Hero ranks.” Quackity tips his head back, grimacing at the ceiling. “And we’re stuck dealing with their messes, as always.”

Chapter End Notes

I see you guysss.

I promised POV change and I'm here to deliveeeeer.

I actually meant to get to this earlier but my IRL life crashed a bit spectacularly and I've been tired between work and school. Took me a bit to get around to editing this up but I'm bopping along to Lovejoy at midnight here and getting stuff done. Yes I am.

(English is my second language and it's *Monday* so if you see any mistakes, no you didn't, shush).

All my love, you guys, I'm having so much fun reading your comments and speculations, makes my day tbh. I'm glad you're having fun with Hush :)

We've got so much cool art!! My dudes!! I'm just gonna collect the links below, go check it out and give them some love. It's amazing and I'm so, so very soft and happy. Absolutely vibing.

ART:

[Learning to cook by owlwinter8 for chapter 2](#)

[THIS IS OUR POGTOPIA by hiblue for chapter 4](#)

[You Got Me a Christmas Present by lilacadaisy for chapter 3](#)

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

He lies on a chest that rises and falls beneath him, his ear angled to listen to the wet *thu-thump thu-thump* of a heart beating.

The house is quiet, the moon casting its light through the windows.

He's managed to shift in the arms wrapped around him, just enough to get a hand up to pick at the threads of Wilbur's sweater as he stares into the dark of the room. At the red dot of light at the television, at the gaming systems that crowd beneath it, at the small candle set in light sand in a glass bowl on the table. At the small details and knick-knacks in a home that was so different from his own bare bones apartment.

There had been a single moment, just a beat of his heart, when he'd thought himself back in Dream's arms. That- maybe it had all just been a long terrible nightmare, or maybe Dream had come back for him to hold him tight and tell him that he had a plan, that he was just waiting for the right opportunity to come and get him home-

His mind had done him no favours with the fervour it tripped into a fool's hope and he feels tired.

"Attachments are a dangerous thing for a Hero," Dream tells him as Tommy, face down on the training mats, paws a hand blindly for his bottle of water with a grumpy huff when he knocks it over. *"It's unrealistic to expect we don't have any, we're only human after all, but it just means we have to be all the more cautious."*

He's thirteen, just on the cusp of turning fourteen and becoming a Hero in his own right, the day circled in red on the calendar Sapnap had hung in the kitchen with pictures of hot firemen in the backdrop of different kinds of fires.

Dream had tried to switch it back to a cat one but had instead come back to each individual cat picture cut out and framed in his bedroom which had made him pause before grudgingly allowing it to stay for a week.

The second attempt had been a peer-effort after Sapnap scared him half to death in the middle of the night as he branded an enormous poster of a kitten into his face. They had spent a good few hour with actual paint to make a somewhat decent effort of getting it into a green hoodie that didn't look half-bad, the smiling mask drawn half-looped around a pointy ear.

They had hung it in Dream's bedroom, right above his bed after getting it framed, their signatures beside little pawprints of their fingers in black.

The firemen calendar had been allowed to stay after that, at least once November had a pair of boxers scrawled on in black sharpie.

"You'll break Gogy's heart," Tommy had said, rolling over on his back to blink at the white ceiling as Dream choked on his water. "Poor fucker has no idea he's crushing on mr hot-and-unavailable with lone wolf attributes."

"I'm trying to be serious here." Dream drags a hand down over his face, peering at him through a spread of his fingers, and Tommy just catches the edge of his mouth twitching up as it lowers before he looks away, bottle crinkling in calloused fingers as he moves to swallow the last down, the back of his hand wiping over his mouth. *"I'm not saying you have to be like, a loner, but- I want you to be careful. I'm-"* Dream had paused, mouth twisting down with a tired sigh as he absently pressed down against the plastic in a half-hearted attempt to fix it. *"I just don't want you to make the same mistakes I made,"* he'd admitted quietly.

Tommy had looked at his mentor, young, only nineteen, still a teenager but ranked among the top ten Heroes of L'Manberg and climbing his way to stand as the Number One Hero.

"I won't," he'd promised. *"I'm not here for them, Dream. I'm here for you."*

There are things that goes unsaid between them during the years and there are things that are spoken louder in gazes exchanges and simple touches shared between them. Tommy is young but he's clever and he understands Dream better than his mentor wishes sometimes, attuned to him after so time spend together, just the two of them.

George and Sapnap lives a life outside Dream but to Tommy Dream *is* his life.

Loyalty as he stands at his mentor's side as his right man hand, given no Hero ranking of his own, *just a sidekick*, something that earns him mocking and scorn, dismissive eyes and honey words that tries to bribe him with status and money as if Tommy had any desire for it.

Dream fears attachment, but Tommy doesn't demand it. He is as much as his mentor wants him to be and he's content with that, understands that there are things Dream can't give him, not in words, but it doesn't matter, because Tommy is allowed closer than anyone else, sees sides of Dream that the world will never know about.

An allowed vulnerability with the shaking panting breath of his mentor burrowing against his chest, trembles running through his body in the night as Tommy does his best to fold around him and promise him everything that he is.

He doesn't need anyone but Dream. That has been his truth since his mentor found him and showed him something beyond cold streets and survival that beats ingrained and hollow in his heart.

Long slim fingers gently threads through his hair, pulling him from his thoughts with a twitch of his fingers. "It's not even four am yet you gremlin, what are you doing awake?" Wilbur murmurs, voice thick with sleep as he blinked brown eyes open in the dark with a small groan and a shift of his body beneath him to roll out stiff shoulders.

Tommy is honestly more used to sleeping in polyphasic or biphasic periods of time, depending on whether he was doing missions or not, and the idea of sleeping a solid eight

hours during a night is entirely alien for him past passing out after long missions.

Sleep should have dragged him down for longer than it had, considering how tired he was the day before, and he knows the smart thing would have been to close his eyes and roll back to sleep, but he hadn't been able to, distracted and lulled into a soft sort of distracted slush of thoughts.

"I usually wake up early," Tommy admits, focusing on his fingers, still picking away at the man's sweater.

"I thought teenagers were infamous for sleeping for hours upon hours," Wilbur breathes out with a sigh, the fingers in his hair sliding down to settle warm against his neck. "What are you thinking about, Toms?" A thumb strokes up beneath his ear, soft to a prickling of his skin. "Your brow is all furrowed."

"Nothing." He tugs at the thread he's managed to untangle from the man's sweater. "Just... stupid shit."

Wilbur hums. "I'm here if you want to talk, you know that, right?"

He grunts noncommittally.

It's quiet, the house dark, Tommy's senses attuned to the beating of the heart below his ear, the rise and fall of Wilbur's chest as he breathes in and out, ribs expanding and then lowering, warm and alive beneath him.

"Can I ask you something?"

"You already did," Tommy huffs. "But sure."

"Do you..." Wilbur's thumb presses against the pulse point on his neck, sliding almost thoughtfully against the bob of his adam's apple as he swallows. "Do you have a family, Toms?"

"No," he admits after a beat. "I don't."

"Does it get lonely?" Wilbur murmurs, voice soft, his warm breath brushing against his ear to a small twitch.

"No."

"I don't know what I would do without Phil and Techno," Wilbur admits to him, a strange sort of thing creeping into his voice, vulnerability and something darker as he shifts beneath him, arm looping around Tommy who blinks as he slides until he's practically sitting in the man's lap, heat prickling up his cheeks. "I'm the oldest." Wilbur's hand drags through the messy curls of his fringe as his head tips back. "I'm supposed to look after Techno, you know? It's my responsibility. But more often than not, he ends up looking after me."

Tommy knits his brows together, unsure of the direction of the conversation.

“I’m always assumed to be the younger of us,” Wilbur admits ruefully. “There’s three years between us but – it’s just how things slotted together when we were growing up. I was the wiry odd kid and Techno – when Phil adopted him – took one look at me and decided that I needed someone to look after me.” His mouth softens, eyes warm and fond. “He’s always been protective.”

“I noticed,” Tommy answers after a moment, studying the man. “It’s bothering you,” he decides. “Why?”

“Just thinking out loud,” he says, mouth curling up. “Want to do something or do you think you’ll be able to go back to sleep?”

“I’m perfectly capable of entertaining myself.” Tommy wrinkles his nose at him.

“Want me to sing you a lullaby?” Wilbur teases, arms dipping around him before he tips back, dragging Tommy along with him in a soft sprawl. “I think I can scramble up something child friendly.”

“Oh fuck off,” Tommy snorts, wrestling with himself for only a moment before he shifts, squirming into a more comfortable position with a rough breath against Wilbur’s shoulder.

There’s silence for a moment and then a soft hum, mouth opening-

Tommy elbows him. *Hard.*

“*Idiot,*” Tommy grumps.

“*Child,*” Wilbur wheezes.

-

Tommy wakes up several hours later to soft snores in his ear, on his side, arms wrapped tight around him and one ridiculously long leg thrown over his hip to keep him firmly in place.

He huffs a small breath against the prickling fabric of Wilbur’s sweater.

Tommy makes an attempt to squirm himself free but Wilbur clutches him tighter with a sleepy grumpy noise and Tommy presses a palm up against his face, squishing his stupid face and twisting to get a knee up between them-

“Want some help with that?” The voice is amused and he pauses, craning his head around to see Phil with his head tilted as he peers down at them both, hair mussed and a robe draped loosely over sleeping pants and a black t-shirt.

“... Please,” Tommy manages, unsquashing Wilbur’s face, shoulders coiling tight as the older man leans down over them both, nudging at Wilbur’s leg and reaching for a pillow to squirm down between Tommy and his chest.

Tommy takes the hint, one hand yanking down at his sweater to keep it in place as he carefully slid out, Wilbur immediately rolling over on his belly with the pillow clutched tight.

“He’s always been a clingy sleeper,” Phil murmurs to him, brushing strands of brown away from his son’s face before straightening up. “Slept well?” he inquires, footsteps silent against the wooden floor as he made his way to the kitchen, Tommy slinking at his heels. “We had the guest room prepared but you both fell asleep before the end of the movie.”

“Oh.” Tommy scratches at his neck. “I slept fine,” he manages, uneasy for a reason he can’t quite pinpoint as Phil moves with familiarity to get the coffee going. “You?”

There’s a pause, blue eyes peering curiously at him. “Quite alright,” Phil tells him with a twitch of his lips. “I washed your clothes if you want to change back into it. We don’t really have a dress code in the house, both my boys will be sleep ruffled once they finally wake up, so do as you like.”

Tommy, who had been combing half-heartedly at his mussed hair, lowers his hand down.

“I’m making pancakes for breakfast,” Phil tells him as Tommy pauses, fingers twitching. “There’s toast and oatmeal if you’d prefer that however.”

“... Pancakes are fine.”

Phil’s makes a low hum in confirmation.

Tommy shifts uncomfortably in the door opening, watching flour and eggs and other ingredients make their appearance on the counter with easy familiarity.

“Can I-“ He hesitates but Phil turns towards him. “Can I help?” he wrestles out.

The man quirks a smile at him. “Of course you can.”

-

“How the fuck does it taste like a normal pancake.” Tommy gives the orange thing a suspicious poke. “It’s like ninety percent carrot.”

“It’s all about picking the right substitutes,” Phil laughs, flipping a blueberry one that looks nearly black from all the berries crammed into a squishy mess in it. “Techno used to complain about getting hungry, like, an hour after Saturday breakfast so I tried some stuff out. Different flour, add some grain or oatmeal, fruit, berries, vegetables.” He shrugs. “I’m partial to the banana pancakes.”

“He tried to feed us broccoli ones,” Wilbur mumbles from the table where he lies half-slumped into the fold of his arms after stumbling inside only minutes earlier. “Let’s not even mention the potato ones.”

“Tech likes those,” Phil says easily. “But he’ll eat most of anything with potatoes.”

“Sounds horrendous,” Tommy says with feeling, offering up the growing plate of pancakes to have the blueberry one placed on the very top. “I wanna try it.”

Phil lets out a startled laugh, something Tommy is starting to realise he does a lot, and it strangely never feels mocking, but more like he's being laughed along with.

"It's in one of the lower drawers in the fridge," Phil tells him. "We'll make two, one for you and one for Techno." Tommy perks up, pulling the fridge open and crouching down to rummage around. "Wil, you're not falling asleep are you?"

"I'm awake," is the mumbled reply, one arm rising in a lazy wave before falling with a dull *thump* against the table as he pushed himself up, peering blearily at them both. "How the fuck are you so goddamn energetic in the morning, Toms? You slept less than *I* did."

"Superior DNA," Tommy informs him, straightening up with an armful of potatoes. "You're just *weak*."

"... I don't have the energy to argue." Wilbur curls his hands around his coffee cup and shoves it forward beseechingly to Phil who snorts, but reaches to refill it. "I'm never ever giving you caffeine."

"I don't need it anyway." Tommy spills the potatoes down on the counter, reaching for the peeler.

"So, New Year's is coming up." Phil flips another pancake. "You planning anything for it, Tommy?"

"Drugs and alcohol," Tommy deadpans. "I'm getting *so* fucking wasted."

Wilbur chokes on his coffee, head snapping up. "The *hell* you are."

Tommy grins, all sharp teeth. "Or what?"

"You're a *child*- for fuck's sake, Toms, do I have to leash you?" Wilbur's brows knit, looking actually fucking *concerned* with the dip of his mouth.

"I'm not actually getting drunk, idiot," he relents with a snort. "It tastes like shit anyway."

"You're *sixteen*, when the fuck did you have alcohol?"

"Wouldn't you like to know, bitch." Tommy gathers the peels together and throws it in the composter bag with a nudge of his foot to get the cupboard beneath the sink open. "Places."

Wilbur gives him a long look. "You're such a fucking gremlin, you're gonna give me a damn heart attack," he groans. "Phil, tell the child he can't have alcohol until he's *at least* twenty-one."

"There are studies on the detrimental effects on young brains affected by alcohol," Phil says without looking at him as Tommy throws him a challenging look. "It's also illegal," he adds after a beat.

"I know my limits," Tommy scoffs, neck prickling uncomfortably. "I'll probably watch a documentary or some shit, stop looking at me like that." He scowls at his friend over his

shoulder.

“Promise?” Wilbur presses, voice tight.

He gives the man a strange look. “I guess? What does it even matter? I’ll do whatever the fuck I want.” He turns to Phil. “Potatoes are done, do I like, mash them?”

Wilbur lets out a low whine, slumping down on the table behind him with a thump of his head.

-

Tommy spends most of the breakfast fiddling with his phone, distractedly eating when Wilbur slides a piece of pancake onto his plate, varying them, Techno ending up with both potato pancakes after Tommy had managed one bite and promptly decided that *fuck no*.

The fucker looks entirely pleased about it too, consuming both without a single thing added to them.

“Sam’s closed until after the New Years, right?” Wilbur inquires as he bites down on a syrup drenched carrot pancake, the whole thing rolled up and slumping on his fork, struggling to stay on.

“Yeah.” Tommy shoves his phone in his pocket, scrubbing a hand against his neck with a grimace. “Said he was busy and shit.”

It had worked out in Tommy’s favour- the days after Christmas had been spent researching and sorting information and finally tracking down Royal.

It’s still early, only nine, and he shoves a piece of banana pancake into his mouth, blinking at the taste of something salty with a furrow of his brow as he chewed it thoughtfully. Caramel? When the fuck had he-

“I need to head off with Phil in a bit,” Wilbur tells him. “If you want, we can drop you off at home.”

“Can you get me to the mall?” Tommy perks up. “There’s one pretty near here, right?”

“Yeah.” Wilbur tilts his head. “It’s gonna be a walk home for you after though.”

“Not like I’ve got anything else planned,” he shrugs.

The other hums. “Alright then.”

-

The mall near Wilbur’s house turns out to be fucking *massive* and despite the early hours there’s already people hurrying around, large bright lettered SALE signs crowding about in the windows.

“There’s a small place down the E-route on the large sign in the middle.” Wilbur is half-hanging out the window of the car, music playing behind him. “A dumpling place – it won’t be as crowded if you hang around long enough to need lunch.” A pause. “If you get lost, just call.”

“I won’t get lost,” Tommy gives him a long look. “The hell?”

“Let me fuss,” Wilbur chides, beckoning him closer, and Tommy rolls his eyes but bends down, wrinkling his nose as the man gave it a flick. “Don’t be a stranger, alright? You’ve got my number, feel free to bug me. I won’t always be able to answer immediately but I’ll try to get back as fast as I can, alright?”

“Yeah, yeah,” he grumbles back, shifting his feet, one hand wrapping around the strap of his backpack. “Can we visit it again?” He lowers his voice, aware of Phil who sits in the driver seat, pretending not to listen. “*Pogtopia?*” he says in a hush.

Wilbur’s mouth curls soft, a secret shared between them in the glimmer of his eyes. “Of course.”

“Together?” Tommy grips his strap tighter. “We don’t need to skate or anything but-“

“I’d love to,” the man assures him, tugging gently at a curl of his hair. “There are some pretty great paths in the forest and we can bring some hot chocolate and food along.”

Tommy gives a small jerky nod, allowing Wilbur to brush a hand over his hair in a small ruffle. “Seeya around, child.”

And- Tommy tries not to dwell at the funny little flutter in his chest, at the strange tug as the window is rolled up, watching as the car rolls into motion, out of the parking lot to leave him behind.

He draws a breath, turning to face the mall with determination settling in the squaring of his jaw.

-

Tommy is well aware that he’s working with scraps.

It’s a frustrating awareness, the power dampener warm against his wrist, unyielding beneath tools and blades, prickling with Bad’s otherworldly magic as he bends a knife beneath it to try and get a look at the enchantment scripted into it.

Bad isn’t human. He’s a rare thing in the world – a full blooded demon, something Tommy had never thought possible before he met the man in the dark haunts of Dream’s apartment, a nervous twist of his dark lips and horns poking out from beneath the hoodie casting shadows over his face, leaving two white irises peering eerily out at him.

Bad is a fucking dork, the antithesis of any information that existed on demons, kind-hearted to a fault, tail swishing behind his back as he crouched down to offer Tommy a candy, smile nervous but hopeful as Tommy slowly reached out to take it.

It's his first time tasting something sweet. He doesn't quite forget it.

He'd been wary and then he'd been fucking enamoured, taking great delight in sneaking up on the demon who'd jump, tail twisting out of reach only to flick teasingly at his nose as Bad rounded upon him, chiding him with a wagging finger as Tommy rolled his eyes and planted himself down on the floor with a pout.

He'd been young when he met Bad. Only nine, distrustful of humans, charmed by the demon that looked at Dream with ancient sad eyes and offered him only kindness.

The metal feels like betrayal against his skin.

Helplessness isn't something Tommy is familiar with and he knows he is far from it. Dream had made sure he knew how to defend himself.

But he's at a disadvantage, no matter how he looks at it, no matter how he fucking *resents it*.

So Tommy forces himself to sit down, to actually fucking *think*, his old hero suit on the table in front of him as he scrubs a hand over his face before dropping it down with a rough exhalation.

He has no Hero ID, most of his armour is missing, save for his mask, and they'd even gone out of their way to take his knives, lockpicks and other knick-knack and tools that had crowded in the pouches on the belt that Sapnap had roughly tugged out of the loops, jaw tight and eyes dark as he discarded it aside as if it meant *nothing*.

He's wary of bulking up. Perhaps it's a good idea to get a proper weapon, an axe like the Blood God or the katana that rested at the hip of the Angel of Death, but he feels paranoid in the sense that he wonders if it's too much of a tell.

The danger lies in that he cannot risk letting the world know that he can't access his powers.

If they do, he's as good as dead.

Red Chaos has a reputation, built on unpredictability and danger. He's Dream's right man hand, a spot not claimed easily, and as long as people thinks he still has his powers he's *dangerous*.

The smart thing is to avoid fight all-together, if he can, so-

Something that wouldn't draw too much attention would be his best bet.

He furrows his brows, mentally tallying through what he knew and weighing it against what could be of use as he slumped back against the couch, head tipping back and eyes on the ceiling above him.

-

Tommy is stubborn.

It's one of his best and worst tributes, unfaltering even when he should, near deaths barely escaped with a bloody bubbling of air choked out over his lips to pool inside his mask as he watches the sky above him.

His body is a decoration of scars; a palm print of fire low on his hip where Sapnap had desperately kept him together, three holes on his chest and back where the Warden's trident had gone through, a scar in his ear where Jester had caught him with a flick of a card and a cocky tilt of his head.

It's stumbling and fumbling mistakes, hits meant for his mentor, a gnarled line of a whip bubbling and scalding the flesh of his arm where it wraps around him, head tilted as he stares unmoving at Schlatt who laughs as Dream carefully takes a measured step from behind his back to stand at his side.

"Your mongrel is well trained, Dream." Schlatt's eyes burn into him, interest and fury alike in those dark eyes of his. *"That kind of loyalty can't be bought for money. How did you do it?"*

Tommy has been called many names during the years. Mongrel, mutt, *bitch*. Words from people who take pleasure in trying to put him down, plates shoved to the ground with a tittering of laughter, roughly shouldered aside with an easy twist of his feet and a mocking curve of his smile behind his mask as he ignores them.

Envy, disgust, pity and *fear*, an inability to understand that Tommy gives himself willingly to Dream and that there's no place he'd rather be than by his mentor's side.

-

The green paint stains his fingers, the smile broad on the back of the hoodie, and Tommy's mouth stretches in an echoing thing.

-

There are nights where Tommy's mind tumbles together with too much, breath caught in his chest and doubts crowding up, second-guessing himself with a swelling of something wretched and thick where it wraps around his heart like a physical weight.

It's the ghostly feeling of cold metal in his hand, of words shouted to a mask that offers no answers, leaving his own words to loop inside his mind until he's wondering if he's going insane.

"We don't kill, Dream!" It's pleading, raw and horrible where it catches in his throat. *"That's your first rule! Or did you forget?"*

There are nights where Tommy buries his head in his pillow and claws his hands into his hair to yank at it, desperate for any sort of distraction as he feels himself fracturing at the seams, wondering if he'd done right or wrong, unable to understand why he'd been left behind when he'd followed rules ingrained into his head from day one.

“We don’t kill, please- Dream don’t fucking do this- “

He’s choking, pleading, powers rising inside him, fingers curling tight into the sweater of the Villain beneath him as the world around them both wavers and twists, like heat waves in a warm night as it distorts around them both.

“I can’t let you do this- please- “

A mask, white with a mocking smile.

-

There are nights where Tommy wishes nothing more than that he’d killed Siren himself.

Chapter End Notes

Welcome back my dudes! I wrote this chapter crying inside bcs word deleted seven pages of it and would not give them back to me. Much mourning was done.

But we're back in business.

Pace is gonna be picking up a bit next chapter, I do believe, and I have many many fun fun things planned.

Such fun.

Oh such fun and joy.

All my love to you guys, it's nearly 3 am so I'm gonna peaceout and sleep. Until next chapter :)

-

We've got so much cool art!! My dudes!! I'm just gonna collect the links below, go check it out and give them some love. It's amazing and I'm so, so very soft and happy. Absolutely vibing.

ART:

[Learning to cook by owlwinter8 for chapter 2](#)

[THIS IS OUR POGTOPIA by hiblue for chapter 4](#)

[You Got Me a Christmas Present by lilacadaisy for chapter 3](#)

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy pauses, hands in his pockets, snow whirling around him as he hesitates for a single beat of a moment before huffing a small sigh to himself and takes a step towards the man arms deep in the hood of his van.

“You, uh, need some help there?”

Quackity jerks up, short enough that he just barely avoids hitting his head, brown eyes blinking at him in surprise.

“You- Tommy, right?” He wipes his hands on his pants, leaving streaks of oil on the fabric, looking entirely unconcerned about it as he leans back against the car with a cursory glance and a fold of his arms. “What are you doing out this late?” the man asks with a quirk of his brow.

“On my way home from work.” Tommy shrugs. “I live down the road.” He tips his head in the general direction.

Quackity is almost a head shorter than him, slim and wiry, the scar on his face stark where it cleaves down his face in a jagged pink split, over his eye and past his lips, twisting them a bit oddly as he smiles, relaxing back. “And you know cars?”

“Would be a bit stupid to offer if I didn’t,” Tommy snorts, rocking back on his heels. “So?”

Quackity cocks his head to the side, considering him. “What do you want in return?”

Tommy stares at him. “What?”

“I mean, as much as I want to believe you’re just offering out of the goodness of your heart,” Quackity spreads his hands out, “I just *don’t*.” A beat. “I also don’t like owing people favours.”

“Oh for-“ Tommy shoves his hands deeper into his pocket, slouching deeper with a harsh breath. “You wouldn’t owe me *shit*.”

“Yeah, no, I don’t believe that.” There’s a note of amusement in the man’s voice now, shifting on his feet, his jacket really too thin for the weather, clever eyes regarding him. “How about this- you help me with my car and I’ll get you something you need.”

“Something I need?” Tommy raises a brow. “The fuck? Like what?”

“I don’t know man, you tell me.” Quackity grins sharply. “People always need shit.”

“This is called *making things needlessly complicated*,” he says flatly, entirely unimpressed. “It’s cold and it’s fucking late, just tell me *yes* or *no* on fixing the car or I’m fucking leaving.”

“Grouchy,” Quackity laughs. “Sure, yes, fix the car, *please*, or I’m gonna freeze my ass off.”

-

“So, you’re Wilbur’s friend, right?” Quackity sits huddled up on the bumper of the van, one foot propped on the headlight, hands stuffed down the pockets of his blue jacket, watching idly as Tommy worked. “How did *that* happen?”

“How does anything happen?” He mutters back, patting down his pocket for his keychain and pulling it up with a twist of the small torch to peer down the oil tank. “How do you know him anyway?”

“We’re not friends, if you’re asking,” Quackity snorts. “I am, however, a good friend of Niki who *is* close to Wilbur so I hear stuff.” He offers a shrug as Tommy side-eyes him. “You’ll find that most of Sam’s regulars are either old friends or acquaintances.”

Tommy makes a low noncommittal noise, twisting the lid back in place.

“It’s not easy to catch the attention of one Wilbur Soot.” There’s an odd undertone in Quackity’s voice, a musing sort of drawl, eyes studying him. “But you’re also the first worked Sam has allowed into his café so perhaps there’s just something about you.”

“I’m just a fucking café worker,” he bites out with a glance before leaning forward to check over the battery, frowning as he squinted closer at the white spots of corrosion, angling his flashlight to get a better look. “When was the last time you changed your battery?”

“... Never?”

Tommy snorts, straightening up. “Yeah, it’s probably the reason you’re stuck. It’s all corroded and shit.” He wipes his hands down his jeans. “You should probably do an oil change too and replace the breaks because they’re barely taking, but the battery is likely the reason you’re stuck now.”

“Fun, fun,” Quackity says with false cheer. “What the fuck do I do about that? I kinda need it tonight.”

“... We could try jumping it?” he offers with a shrug. “You’ve got cables?”

“Don’t we need another car for that?” Quackity raises a brow.

“*Well-*” Tommy gestures to the row of cars in front of them.

-

“This is definitively illegal.” Quackity points out mildly as Tommy pries the door open with a click of the lock and opening it up to a blink of surprised eyes.

“It’s not like we’re stealing shit,” Tommy snorts, bending down beneath the wheel and prying open the lid there to access the knotted heap of wires. “We’re just... borrowing some energy.”

“Don’t misunderstand me, I don’t give a fuck, if you can get my car running I’m all happy.” Quackity leans against the car, keeping an eye out. “So, how did you learn? Just pick it up one day?”

“Do you want your fucking car to start or no?” He brings a wire to his mouth, biting down with a twist of his teeth to strip it bare, spitting the plastic out on the mat.

“Shutting up,” Quackity laughs, spreading his hands out innocently. “Do you know how to drive too?”

“Decently enough,” Tommy grunts, shifting to hook one leg around the headrest of the seat as he sunk deeper down in an awkward backward sprawl. “Why do you need the van so badly anyway this late?”

“To be honest, I could just as well deal with it in the morning,” Quackity snorts, adjusting his beanie. “But I’m helping a friend haul some stuff to his new place and well,” he gestures loosely, “morning traffic is not the most fun.”

“Fair enough.” He twists two wires together and there’s a rumble from the car, his mouth stretching into a grin as he disconnected them again before he hauled himself up. “There,” he proclaims with some satisfaction. “Let’s hook the batteries up and we’ll hopefully get your shitty van running.”

“Hey now, it’s a perfectly good van!” Quackity protests, but he’s offering a hand with a grin of his own, and Tommy hesitates for only a moment before clasping it, letting the other haul him out with a steadying grip and a hand clapping friendly against his shoulder to a twitch. “Seriously though, thanks dude, I wasn’t fancying walking home in this weather.”

“Save the thanks until it’s actually running.”

Quackity shrugs. “I still owe you for taking the time.”

“You owe me *nothing*.”

“I know where you work.” Quackity is unconcerned by the bite of his tone, circling the car to open the passenger seat and hit the lock to open the hood of the car with a *pop*. “I’ll get you something and you’ll love me for it,” he proclaims, catching the cables Tommy throws to him.

“I sincerely doubt it- *positive first*,” he yelps when Quackity moves to shove them in place. “For fuck’s sake, don’t touch *anything* until I tell you to,” Tommy snaps.

“Cars aren’t really my thing,” Quackity says a tad sheepishly, lowering the clamps down.

“You don’t fucking say.”

Tommy only knows cars because Sapnap liked to tinker and didn't mind him hanging around in the garage, listening to the older teen explain this and that, oil staining his fingers, smudging at his cheek where he'd brush a stray strand away where it had escaped his headband, music playing in the background.

Sapnap would hum along, occasionally singing a line or two, Tommy's leg dangling from the tall chair, tools spread out beside him, a small break in a world for just the two of them.

"You never know when stuff like this will come in handy," Sapnap had said, wiping his stained fingers on the red dirty rag tied to a hoop in his jeans. "It's probably a bit unethical for a Hero but- when it comes to a situation between life and death, just steal a fucking car, man."

Sapnap had been the one to teach him how to drive, too. Circling round and round on an abandoned track he'd stolen Tommy away too after a heated argument with Dream who'd finally relented, hand scrubbing anxiously against the back of his neck before falling down at his side.

"It'll be good for his cover too," Sapnap had pushed and it had been the one thing that finally tipped the scales.

"He's not even old enough to have a license!"

"Even more reason for him to know how to drive a fucking car!" Sapnap had been quick to snap back. *"We live in the city, Dream, fucking everyone knows how to drive a goddamn car so a top Hero who doesn't know how is suspicious as hell! And what if you're hurt, huh? And the only way you're getting away is in a fucking car and he doesn't know how to drive one, then what?"*

It's not really life or death, and the only reason Tommy had stopped in the first place is because Quackity's a friend of Sam's.

But he's no longer a Hero and he's kinda past the point of giving a shit.

Cables in place he twists the two wires together again, making sure to turn the radio and air condition off.

"And now what?" Quackity asks as he hauls himself out the car.

"We wait," Tommy shrugs. "We'll know if it works in a few minutes."

Quackity fishes for his phone, unlocking it with a press of his thumb, fingers tapping over the screen. "Just letting them know I'll be late," he informs Tommy distractedly.

"Don't care."

Quackity glances at him with a blink. "You're not really a people person, are you?" He presses his thumb down, clicking the screen off and sliding it back into his pocket before stretching his arms up above him with a crack of his spine, following the motion until he's

leaning back against the car with a tilt of his head. “You know, I wasn’t joking – I don’t think Sam has ever hired someone before.”

“There’s a first time for everything,” Tommy snorts. “I’ve never helped anyone hotwire a car either and yet *here we are*.”

“Fair enough,” Quackity laughs, sliding his hands into the pockets of his jackets and stomping his feet in the snow, clearly cold, his breath misting in the air as he breathes out with a sigh. “So, what’s your story, Tommy? You just turned up here out of the blue and happened to stumble into the café one day?”

Tommy slides him a long look. “I needed a job.”

“Don’t we all,” Quackity hums. “You could have picked a worse place than Sam’s, I’ll have to be honest. He’s one of the rare ones, you know? He just... genuinely *cares*.” His mouth curls soft with a small huff. “He took me in, when I was around your age, a bit younger perhaps. He made me who I am today, practically raised me.” The shorter man glances towards him, eyes sharp and intelligent. “You’re a street kid, aren’t you?”

He hesitates but- “Yeah,” he admits, seeing no real harm in it.

“I can tell,” Quackity offers him a grin of teeth. “You’ve got that look in your eyes, same as me.”

He grunts noncommittally.

“So, what are you doing once we’re done here?” Quackity pries after just a beat of silence. “Because if you’ve got the time I wouldn’t mind some help hauling stuff.” A kick of his foot, body slumping further against the car. “It was a bit last minute, this whole thing, so we’re just three moving stuff – a fourth would even it out, make it easier to carry the heavy stuff.”

Tommy tilts his head up, his own breath misting the air, thinking back on his empty apartment.

“I have time,” he finds himself saying.

-

Tommy kicks the door of the van open, sliding down with a watery splash in the slush of the snow as he peers up at the apartment complex, hands slipping into the pocket of his jeans.

Quackity has already circled the car, opening the backdoor wide before trotting over to the intercom, pressing the numbers before leaning forward to wait as it buzzes through, his voice reaching Tommy in a low murmur and a low huffed laugh as he leans forward to rest his elbow against the red bricks, talking in a low hush.

It’s January, two days past New Year’s, a day that came and went with fireworks bright outside his window as Tommy stared at the screen of his laptop, elbows against his knees and a lime green hoodie hugged tight against his chest as the hours, minutes and seconds counted down.

He shifts his feet, drags his beanie off, and scrubs a hand through the messy strands of blond hair, tugging a bit too roughly to get his fingers free when they tangled in his fringe.

There's a buzz and a click, Quackity snagging the door to the apartment complex open with a tug, kicking down the metal door stopper with a screech before it snags on a hole in the paved ground, his head turning and brow quirking up.

-

"Ah!" A cardboard box hits the floor roughly, wide brown eyes and a finger pointing accusingly at him. "It's you! Bee boy!"

"If anyone here is to be called *bee boy* it's you, Tubbo." The tall masked boy from the skate rink raises a hand in a small awkward wave from behind the shorter boy who is still staring at Tommy who has shifted surreptitiously closer to Quackity, eyes narrowing. "Hello again, I don't think I caught your name last time."

"It's because I didn't give you one," Tommy mutters, regretting all his life choices.

"You already know each other?" Quackity cranes his head around to raise a brow at him and Tommy doesn't miss the suspicious flare in his eyes and-

"I'm leaving," he decides, turning on his heel.

"Hey- wait, hey now, Tommy, come back here, man-" A hand snags around his wrist, tugging him back, and he doesn't miss the warning in the squeeze of fingers as Quackity's eyes flicks between them. "Anyone wanna explain?"

"That idiot tripped me at the ice rink a few days ago," Tommy bites out, fingers curling. "And then he tried to blame *me*."

"You did trip me." Tubbo folds his arms. "But I forgive you, big man! Anyone who likes bees-"

"*I hate them.*"

"- can't be bad!" Tubbo's voice goes up, clearly ignoring him, and Tommy twitches.

"How do you know him, Quackity?" Ranboo asks with an apologetic look that Tommy ignores, mouth twisting with a baring of teeth.

He glances down as fingers loosens around his wrist and it raises to pat against his shoulder, grin back on Quackity's face. "He's *Wilbur's* Tommy. Works for Sam down at the café."

"What the hell is *that* supposed to mean?" Tommy demands, whipping around to stare at Quackity who meets his gaze with a tilt of his head and an odd twist of his lips, eyes flickering with something Tommy doesn't understand.

"I'm not wrong, am I?" Quackity's smile is all teeth. "You're *friends*, right?"

“Wilbur doesn’t *have* friends.” Ranboo slowly places a box down, crammed with things and badly taped together with an odd folding of the flaps to try and fit over something big and round. “No offense or anything,” he tacks on when Tommy glares at him. “But, um, how did *that* happen?”

Tubbo tilts his head, long brown fringe sliding over his eyes, locked on Tommy with curiosity.

“None of your fucking business,” Tommy bites out, hunching his shoulders. “Do you want some fucking help or *not*?”

“Chill,” Quackity moves to pat his back and Tommy twists, stepping back with a narrowed look that gains him two hands raising innocently. “Look, Ran isn’t exactly *wrong*. Wilbur isn’t a *make friends* sort of person so you can’t blame us for being curious.”

“Wilbur is cool,” Tubbo pipes up and Tommy flicks his gaze to him. “But he keeps to himself.” The shorter boy spreads his hands out with a *what can you do* sort of look. “He’s only close with his family, really, so when we heard about you it caught us a bit off-guard.”

“Wilbur being my friend is none of your fucking business so you can all shove your curiosity elsewhere.” Tommy draws a breath, stuffing down the ugly parts of him that takes too much delight in the words with a cocking of his head and a sharp flash of teeth. “I’m only here because I like Sam and you’re his, what, *pseudo son*?” He glances at Quackity who raises a brow back, unruffled by his bite. “Either get moving or I’m fucking leaving,” he concludes.

There’s a moment of silence, Quackity studying him, Ranboo and Tubbo exchanging looks, the taller shrugging.

“You heard the man,” Quackity claps his hands together, taking a step into the apartment. “*Let’s get this show on the road.*”

-

“Wait- I’ll get the other side-“ Ranboo bends down to grab the box, hauling it up, head twisting to push the mask up his nose with a press against his shoulder and a flicker of his eyes when Tommy’s lips thin. “I just wanted to say thank you,” the taller says as Tommy angles backwards out of the apartment, towards the stairs, because apparently the elevator was out which just *fantastic*, really.

“It’s nothing,” Tommy bites out when the silence stretches awkwardly between them. “Not like I was doing anything else.”

“I still appreciate it,” Ranboo says with an apologetic twist of his voice. “I know- um, I know we didn’t make the best first impression, all things considered, but- it’s nice to meet you Tommy and thank you for helping us move.”

Tommy gives him a suspicious look before flicking his gaze away, mentally measuring out the distance to the first step of the stairs. His sneaker finds it perfectly, his grip tightening as

he made his way backwards down with a tensing of his shoulders as Ranboo rustled the box, bending slightly, gangly with long arms and even longer legs.

“I’m sorry if we made you uncomfortable,” the other boy continues when Tommy doesn’t answer. “We all – well, we’ve known Wilbur for *years*, he’s kinda part of the, um, *friendship group*, so to say.”

“I thought you said he didn’t *have* friends,” Tommy bites out, unimpressed.

“It’s complicated,” Ranboo sighs, looking almost wistful for a moment. “I’m close with his brother-“

“You’re friends with *Techno*?” Tommy blurts out, halting to stare at the other. “How the fuck did *that* happen?”

“You’ve *met him*?” Ranboo looks mutually surprised, straightening as much as he could without tipping Tommy backwards and down the stairs, which, *tall fucker*.

“Yeah,” Tommy frowns. “A bit of a weirdo. Pretty as *fuck* but an asshole.”

“That’s Techno alright.” Ranboo’s mouth stretches out behind the mask. “He’s- I mean, he’s *cool*, isn’t he?” And – yeah, the admiration is pretty blaring and Tommy snorts, stepping back, forcing Ranboo to hurriedly follow after him with a tug and rustle of the content in the box. “He- well, he helped me get a place to stay after I, um, well – I have memory issues?”

“Are you telling me or asking me?” Tommy asks with a dubious look.

“Telling you,” Ranboo says after a beat, eyes peering curiously at him. “Techno asked the same thing when I met him.” There’s a beat. “But, yeah, I – I don’t really remember anything from the first... fourteen or so years of my life? Techno found me and he, well, he helped me out, got me an apartment – where we’re moving Tubbo’s stuff now – and got me enrolled in school and stuff.” He looks embarrassed, head ducking as they take a turn to another set of stairs. “I owe him a lot,” he admits. “He’s the reason I’ve got a family as well, siblings. *Two* even.”

Tommy stares at him.

“Right,” he settles on, an odd curling in his gut as they reach the rounding of the second floor.

“Wilbur is... I mean, he’s a bit of a complicated guy,” Ranboo muses, looking over Tommy’s shoulder with a dip of his brow. “He’s- he’s never been unkind, quite the opposite, I think, and he has this way of- well, making people feel welcome but he doesn’t let people *close*.” Ranboo looks at him, head tilting. “He’s a charismatic guy and he’s got a lot of people looking out for him.”

“That a threat?”

“A heads-up.” Ranboo’s eyes softens and there’s something kind there, as much as Tommy doesn’t understand it or wants anything to do with it. “Techno is very protective of his family.

Philz-“ He stumbles over his words, throat clearing. “Phil too,” he says as they reach the first floor, the taller halting him with a clack of his dress shoes against the floor.

Tommy narrows his eyes. “Just get to the fucking point.”

Dual toned hair, black and white, split perfectly, one eye murky green and the other a dull sort of maroon, dressed in a too big Hawaiian shirt that slouches off one shoulder, orange and patterned with pineapples and blossoming flowers in white.

Ranboo doesn’t make for a very intimidating person, despite his height, a slump to his shoulders as if trying to make himself smaller than he was, but there’s something in the way his eyes settles briefly on his that makes the skin on the back of his neck prickle before they slide down to stare at the cardboard between them.

“I don’t know you, Tommy,” the other boy carefully picks his words, fingers tightening on the box, “but we’re a close bunch and I’d hate for us to get off on the wrong foot.”

“There is no foot,” Tommy bites out. “I’m not making *friends* with you. I’m just helping because I had nothing better to do, and I like Sam.” He bares his teeth. “I don’t, however, like *you*.”

Ranboo tilts his head and there’s something in his eyes that makes Tommy bristle.

“It would be easier for you,” is all the other says, taking a step forward, but Tommy plants his feet and refuses to budge to a cautious dip of the other’s brows as he’s regarded in turn.

“I don’t care,” he tells the tall boy, “about your little *friend group* and I don’t give a fuck about whether people like me or not. I don’t know what you’re angling for here but my business is *mine* and *mine* alone and I don’t appreciate people butting into it.” He narrows his eyes, lips curling back. “You understand me?”

“Is that a threat?” Ranboo asks, tone mild.

“I don’t make threats,” Tommy takes a forceful step back, forcing the other to move with him, “I make *promises*.”

He twists around, shifting to grasp the box behind his back, baring his teeth at Tubbo who is leaning back against the open door, eyes unreadable where they meet his.

“What are you looking at?” he snaps.

“Why don’t you go home, Tommy.” Tubbo cocks his head, pressing away from the door. “I think we can handle the rest.”

Tommy doesn’t hesitate to drop the box, Ranboo letting out a startled noise behind him as he tipped abruptly from the weight change, but Tubbo lurches forward, catching and hoisting it up before it could crash to the ground with a frown.

The night is dark, streetlights stretching far between each other, casing circles of dim glow against the snow and slush, and Quackity is leaning against the van, mouth thinned out and

arms crossed.

Tommy doesn't bother to do more than glance at him before he takes a hard right, more than done with the entire situation and regretting offering to help in the first place.

"I still owe you one," Quackity hollers after him, voice loud in the empty street.

"You don't owe me *shit*," Tommy snarls back. "Just leave me the fuck alone!"

There's a noise, a sigh and a muttered curse, and he curls his shoulders at the sound of steps behind him before he twists on his heel, stepping back with a glower as Quackity comes to a halt in front of him.

"Look, man, I don't know what that was about but- I really do appreciate you helping me out today, yeah?" The short man, rubs a hand against the back of his neck, wind ruffling his thin jacket. "You didn't have to help but you did and that's- well, most people would have just left but you didn't so you can't be all bad under that prickliness." It's meant to be teasing, Tommy recognizes, but there's a buzz in his veins and fury misplaced and bleeding through the cracks.

He's Sam's friend, he reminds himself as he clenches and unclenches his hand. *Practically his son, he said so.*

And- it's not Quackity he's mad at, not even Ranboo, or Tubbo, really. He *knows that*. But it doesn't stop the anger from sinking its claws into his heart, to choke thick in his throat as his ribs expands and lowers with his harsh breaths as he stares into brown eyes that slowly eases into something vaguely concerned that he hates.

Tommy is angry at himself, he's angry at Dream, he's angry at Siren and he's angry at fucking *Wilbur* who makes everything far too complicated and who has *friends but not friends* who are overstepping in all the worst ways when Tommy is still struggling with grasping onto the very real fact that he gives a shit about the man in the first place.

There's a lime green hoodie under his pillow where he hadn't found it in himself to shove it back after he found it in the depth of his wardrobe, still smelling faintly of his mentor, a tear in the side and splattered with old blood dried rusty red on the fabric and Tommy-

Tommy is so fucking *tired*. He's overwhelmed and he's doing his best, he *is*, he has to believe that, but it's been *two months* and his mentor is wrapped up in something *bad* and he's not doing enough, limits be fucking damned, *he's not doing enough*.

And-

Maybe it's a choking realization, that Wilbur has people who care, a life outside him while Tommy has *nothing*, an ugly curl of envy and something thick and horrible that wraps around his heart and lungs, leaden weight and reminder that he's the outsider here, *that he doesn't belong*.

“Hey, are you okay?” Quackity takes a step towards him, a hand reaching out to grasp his wrist-

“*Don’t fucking touch me,*” Tommy jerks back with a stumble of his feet, and Quackity raises both hands, brow furrowed as he takes a step back as Tommy hunches on himself.

“Alright, man, it’s- do you want me to call Wilbur?” the man pursues with a shift of his feet. “You don’t look too good there.”

“I’m *fine*,” he snarls, voice rasping thick on the words as he claws himself together, jaw clenching tight. “I’m fucking- *fine*.”

“You’re obviously *not*,” Quackity sighs, adjusting his beanie. “Look, you’re not in any state to walk home on your own, not like this, so let me call Wilbur or Sam so you can get a ride home and you can sort yourself out and pretend you’re however fine you want to be once you’re *safe*.”

“Why do you *care*?” Tommy bristles.

“Why did you stop to help me?” Quackity snaps right back before he takes a deep breath. “Look, you’re a kid, and like it or not Wilbur and Sam both cares about you, which means I do too, so- give me a name and I’ll call and you can just... sit there and wait.”

Tommy is Red Chaos – he’s the sidekick of the Number One Hero, crafted to stand as the best of the best, relied on, trusted with his mentor’s secrets and vulnerabilities, trusted to keep him *safe*.

Tommy stands on a near empty street, opposite a man he barely knows, whose van he’d fixed because he can’t stand the silence of his apartment, and he hates what he’s been reduced to.

I’m more than this, he thinks just a tad desperately as Quackity pulls his phone from his pocket, gaze expectant and waiting. *I’m so much fucking more than this*.

He’d stood at the very top of the world and he sinks down on the dirty sidewalk, averting his gaze with a clenching of his teeth, cold slush melting through his jeans, but he can’t find it himself to care.

“Wilbur,” he bites out with resignation that settles heavy on his shoulders. “Call Wilbur.”

“Alright,” Quackity breathes out. “I’ll call Wilbur so just – stay there, okay?”

And it’s not like Tommy has anywhere else to go, really.

Nowhere but an empty apartment that he hates with the very depth of his beating heart.

Tommy: *is hero*

Also Tommy: *casually does crime*

I love Quackity with all my heart and I am so so happy to have him and Tommy finally meet properly bcs plot but also bcs!! Quackity!!

Also, Ranboo and Tubbo are back. It's going just swimmingly for our benchtrio as you can see. A heart warming mutual blossoming of friendship.

Thank you for all the lovely support, it means the world to me, truly. It's almost summer which means no school and more writing time for me so I'm excited for that :)

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We've got so much cool art!! My dudes!! I'm just gonna collect the links below, go check it out and give them some love. It's amazing and I'm so, so very soft and happy. Absolutely vibing.

ART:

[Learning to cook by owlwinter8 for chapter 2](#)

[You Got Me a Christmas Present by lilacadaisy for chapter 3](#)

[THIS IS OUR POGTOPIA by hiblue for chapter 4](#)

[Red Chaos by fridges](#)

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The car that slowly rolls to a halt in front of him is a red SUV, windows tinted dark, and he lifts his head, narrowing his eyes as a door opens up, boots thudding wet against the ground.

“You’re not Wilbur,” Tommy bites out as Techno rounds the car into his view, dressed in a red coat, pants tight against his legs and boots high on his calves, the front part of his hair pulled back in a small knot.

“I would hope I’m not,” is the dry response as the man crouches down in front of him, elbows resting loose on his knees, head tilting as he’s regarded with unreadable eyes. “Birdie over there called Wil who rung me up to peer pressure me into hauling you home. I was told to let you know he’s currently wrapped up in work and that he’s *very sorry*.”

“Peer pressured?” Tommy snorts tiredly. “So you, what, have *no spine*?”

“Quackity did say you were in a bit of a mood,” Techno hums, a low rumbling sort of thing, casting a glance towards the building where the van has all doors closed shut, all packed and ready to roll.

Techno raises a hand and headlights flicker to life in acknowledgement before it slowly rolls into motion with a turn to take off in the opposite direction.

“So, what happened?” Techno asks, turning his attention back to him.

“Nothing,” Tommy huffs, wrapping his arms tighter around himself.

“Uh-huh,” Techno’s mouth curls in a wry sort of twist. “*Nothing* is why you’re currently seated on a sidewalk, in the snow, far from home.” A beat. “I was told you picked a fight with Ranboo.”

“*I* didn’t fucking pick *anything*,” Tommy jerks his head up with a curl of his lips. “*He* was the one being fucking grade-A assholes when I was just trying to haul boxes! *He* was the one who couldn’t mind his own fucking business and-” His fingers sink into his arms, mouth snapping shut. “Just- just get me the fuck home,” he hisses out, frustration wiring tight through him alongside exhaustion that settles bone deep.

Techno considers him for a moment longer before grunting, straightening up and reaching out to offer his hand.

Tommy ignores it, climbing to his feet with a small wobble, grimacing at the cold wet feeling of his pants, legs frozen stiff.

“You’ll ruin my leather,” Techno observes mildly as he takes in the state of him.

“I can just fucking walk,” Tommy bites out mulishly. “I *would have* if Quackity didn’t look like he’d fucking tie me down if I tried.”

“He’s smarter than you are.” The older man circles his car, opening up the trunk, and for a single beat Tommy wonders if Techno was considering stuffing him in there.

But instead he hauls out a red blanket, obnoxiously large where it pools in his arms after closing the trunk shut again.

“Here- I’d rather not deal with a fretting Wil if you managed to get sick on top of everything.” The blanket is thrown to him and Tommy blinks as his cold fingers sink into it, momentarily distracted by the sheer softness of it, unable to resist rubbing it between his thumb and index finger as he uses his left hand to fumble the door open.

He glances at Techno who had hauled himself into the driver seat, reaching to turn the heat on full blast, no music playing on the speakers, everything impeccably clean, the opposite of Wilbur’s car.

Tommy bites the inside of his cheek before he leans forward to roughly spread it out as best as he can over the leather and then hoists himself up and wraps himself in it after dragging the door shut, smoothing it out over his legs and tugging to get it up around his shoulders before sinking back.

“Seatbelt,” the other reminds him with a glance as he shifts the gear, and Tommy blows harshly through his nose but shifts to comply, shoving it down with a hard jerk and a *click*. “Thank you,” Techno says wryly as the car rolls into motion.

The silence stretches between them, the world dark outside, but strangely there’s nothing awkward about it and he leans his forehead against the cool glass, tracking the streetlights with a flick of his eyes as they go by.

“I heard you helped Quackity out with his van,” Techno comments after a good ten minutes, Tommy’s mind soothed to a strange lull, comfortably toasty from the combination of seat heater, blanket and air condition filling the car with hot air, exhausted from the anger that flickers and grows in his chest, smoothed out to mere embers in the aftermath.

Tommy hums.

“Why?”

He blinks in confusion, glancing over at the man who sits relaxed, leather gloved hands wrapped around the steering wheel.

“I hot wired a car to jump his fucking van and you’re asking *why*.” Tommy stares at him for a moment longer before looking away with a tired huff. “Most people would be concerned with the, you know, the whole *illegal activities* bit of it.” He toes his shoes off, brushing a hand down discreetly to make sure his socks were decently dry before dragging them up on the seat, making sure to keep them on top of the blanket. “He’s Sam’s friend and he needed help.” A beat. “And it’s not like I had anything better to do.”

“It’s nearly two am and you were helping three strangers move almost an hour from your own apartment.” Techno flicks the right blinker, his hands shifting sure and smooth on the wheel, the car almost eerily silent even with the slushy gritty pavement, and a part of Tommy that sounds suspiciously like Sapnap wonders about the upgrades responsible. “That’s not really how most spend their Thursday evenings.”

“Yeah, well, it was that or spending the evening alone, watching another fucking nature documentary.” Tommy hunches on himself, frowning out at nothing.

“So, a distraction,” Techno concludes.

“What about it?” Tommy presses his chin down against his knees, properly curled up now. “You gonna lecture me about it? Pretend you give a shit?”

“Nah, I’ll leave that to Wil.” It’s said so simple, so naturally, as if it was a clear thing that Wilbur would be upset to hear about it, possibly worried and- “He cares about you, for better or for worse,” Techno continues with a look as they roll to a stop at a red light. “Do you understand what it looks like from an outside perspective?”

“What are you on about?” Tommy stares at him. “Like *what* looks like?”

Techno drags a hand down his face, looking back out at the street as red flicked to yellow and finally green, the car slowly rolling into motion, hand settling back on the steering wheel with a sigh.

“You’re a sixteen-year-old kid and you didn’t hesitate to go along with a stranger in a van.” A pause, Tommy’s brow furrowing in confusion. “Quackity wouldn’t have done anything to hurt you. *I* know that, *Wil* knows that, but how sure could *you* have been?” Techno’s strange eyes flick towards him. “You followed him to an unknown location, asking no questions.”

“He’s Sam’s friend.”

“Sam has a lot of people who would claim him as a friend, not all of them good.” Techno’s gaze is unreadable. “You ever hear of stranger danger?”

“I’m not stupid,” he bristles, fingers digging into his calves.

“Never said you were,” Techno says dryly. “But that doesn’t make in any less of a stupid decision.”

Tommy slams his teeth down hard on the inside of his cheek, the taste of iron spilling into his mouth like a familiar thing, thick on his tongue as he jerks his head aside and glares out the window, at the snow melting against it to droop down, fingers pushing up his sleeve to clench down against the silver band wrapping around his wrist.

It feels condescending but, he knows, that by all reason, Dream wouldn’t have been impressed either.

As much as his mentor enjoyed risks there’s a difference between a calculated one, a choice made under pressure, and one that cannot actually be reasoned beyond *I really don’t give a*

fuck.

And the words tastes childish, swallowed down, nails scraping against his wrist, trying and failing to pry beneath the metal, against a wrap of scars from knives and tools he'd tried and failed, blades scraping against bone with blood bubbling and spilling down into a growing pool on his kitchen floor, frustration and a horribly wretched sort of helplessness flooding him as he's forced to give up on it over and over again.

Tommy has never heard about power suppressors before. Hadn't thought it possible to cut off something so firmly engrained and wired into his very core with scribbles powered by whatever the fucking *hell* Bad had done to make it.

He'd hung around the demon enough to know *about* enchantments, runes, letters, fucking *scribbles* powered by something Bad would merely quirk his lips at with a shake of his head when Tommy had tried to weasel it out of him.

"Some things are better if they aren't shared, little one," Bad would say, tail curling behind him with an apologetic flick. *"I exist, and I make them, but this is a craft that is better if it dies with me."*

It doesn't stop Tommy from trying.

A fruitless clawing obsession that prevents him from just doing *nothing*.

"Giving up is the same as death." Dream's green eyes had been bright when they met his as he stumbled to his feet, blood dripping hot between his fingers as he clenches his teeth tight, reaching for that familiar hot wrap of power. *"But you already know that, don't you, Tommy?"*

"I'm not much for the whole *emotions* thing," Techno says beside him and he refuses to look at the older man, gaze locked on the window without really seeing. "But you're clearly dealing with something and now Wil's getting dragged into it which makes *you* my problem as well."

Tommy's hand is grasping for the door handle before he can think twice about it, seatbelt unbuckled with his left, the metal clicking open, and there's a screech of tires, car jerking, door swinging wide with a violent snap, and Tommy half-way out of it before a hand curls into the back of his jacket and yanks him back with a hard lurch of motion.

It topples him back, socked feet sliding against leather, tangled in a wrap of red, spine bending awkwardly and-

He twists but Techno is faster, an arm looping tight to pin him in an awkward half-sprawl back against the man, gear stick digging awkwardly into his hip as he bares his teeth with a hiss, gaze burning lividly up at the other who is pale, something startled in the eyes that stare down at him as his chest heaves beneath a tense arm.

His left hand digs nails into the man's thigh, the other caught in a claw like grip against the wrist of the arm around him.

“*What,*” Techno says slowly, hand curling tight around Tommy’s bicep, “do you think you’re doing *exactly.*”

“Getting the hell out,” Tommy bites out, mouth curling and skin crawling. “I *refuse* to be fucking *pitied* and I’m no one’s fucking *problem* so you can take your shitty attitude elsewhere to someone who wants it.”

“*You’re in way over your head, Dream.*” George’s eyes had flickered to Tommy who’d stood in the shadows of the doorway, out of his mentor’s sight, sixteen, blue eyes unreadable as he met the gaze of his mentor’s friend. “*It wasn’t a bad idea from the start but now- he’s becoming a problem, surely you see that?*”

“*Don’t say that!*” Dream’s voice had been loud, echoing through the walls of the apartment with the slam of his palm against the wall. “*Tommy isn’t a problem so don’t fucking call him that, George! Or it’s going to be you and me who have a problem.*”

The silence had been ringing thing, George’s mouth curling down, dressed in a too large beige sweater, hair rumpled and looking strangely small in the kitchen.

“*You can’t continue on like this, Dream.*” George’s eyes had averted from his, socked feet shifting, drawing back from Dream who stands with his shoulders bunched tight. “*It’s not fair, for either of you.*”

He sinks nails into the arm around him, mouth twisting. “Let me go,” he demands with a wretched sort of beating of his heart.

Techno stares at him for a long moment, the back of Tommy’s neck prickling in response, his breathing loud in the silent car, sucked in and let out in harsh pushes of air through his nose, something ugly and wrathful crawling in his chest.

The man lets out a sigh, long-suffering as he raised his head up to look out the window.

The cold air from the open-door prickles where the wet fabric of his jeans sticks to Tommy, an abrupt contrast from the heat of the car and blanket that had lulled him into a false sense of security, and the longer he remains in the hold, the more aware he becomes of the strange heat of the other that bleeds through his jacket from his solid form, a shiver running through him.

Mob hybrid, he remembers, too late, a strange buzz in the back of his mind, a wrestle of two very different instincts as muscles refuses to budge even an inch.

A part of Tommy wants nothing more than to hurt him.

Wants to claw fingers into flesh, to bruise his face and chest, to sink his teeth down and tear him bloody until he has no choice but to release him, an answer to the emotions that bubbles and froths beneath the surface, wiring through his veins, begging to be let out.

But he grasps for reason with desperate hands because Techno is Wilbur’s *brother* and Tommy is lonely in the worst kind of ways and he’s not meant to hurt civilians.

“I’m sorry.” The words are pulled out with a twist of a mouth, a clear reluctance and an uncomfortable tensing of jaw muscles before the man sighs. “I should have worded things differently.”

“Sure,” Tommy snarls. “Tell me in all the different words how much of a fucking *problem* I am, how much my presence bothers you, how much of a fucking *inconvenience*—“

“I didn’t mean it like that,” Techno interrupts him, a shift in his body-language that makes Tommy shrink down, eyes narrowing, wary and distrustful. “If I let you go, will you close the door and give me a moment to explain?” It’s a patient kind of thing, a head tilting, soft pink hair sliding over the collar of his coat. “I’d rather not have to explain to Wil I lost you in the middle of nowhere.” A wry quirk of his lips. “Would make family a dinner a bit awkward.”

“Why do I care?” Tommy forces out.

“You care about Wilbur.” Techno’s gaze is ruthless in its knowing. “If you didn’t, I wouldn’t be here.”

Tommy’s jaw clenches tight but he can’t find it in himself to deny it.

“Release me.”

“Promise me first,” Techno says, unconcerned by the livid look it garners him. “I’m not hunting you down, brat.”

“Not a fucking *brat*, asshole.”

“You’re a particularly feral child,” the man snorts, mouth curling with a flash of sharp canines. “And unfortunately for you, you’re not getting rid of me. So- *promise* and I’ll release you and we can sort this situation out like two adults.”

“I- fine!” Tommy undigs his nails from the man’s thigh. “Fucking- *fine*, I *promise*,” he bites out.

Techno’s grip relinquishes and Tommy wastes no time getting himself out of his grasp with a rough shove, grimacing as he got himself off the fucking gear stick, planting himself in the passenger seat and reaching out to drag the door shut with more force than necessary.

He realizes Techno’s seatbelt is unbuckled when he looks back at the other, likely the only reason he’d managed to reach Tommy in the first place. Fucker had been *fast* and he makes a mental note of it as he folds his arms tight and angles to get his back to the door.

“So?” he forces out. “You’re the adult so fucking- *adult* then.”

Techno’s look speak of dislike but he faces Tommy properly, apparently keen on keeping his word. “I care about my family.” The words sounds like they’re dragged out of him with a brief tensing of his jaw before it smooths out.

“So I’ve been told,” Tommy mutters bitterly. “More than *once*. You’d think I’d been caught plotting to shank Wilbur in his fucking sleep instead of giving him a goddamn scarf.”

A low noise, something amused that makes Tommy scowl at the man.

“Let me be blunt then- Wil can make whatever friends he likes,” Techno tells him with a tilt of his head, his features sharp, a brush of long slim fingers tucking pink hair behind a pointed ear. “But I care about him and that means that when a strange volatile kid appears from nowhere to wiggle into his life I will concern myself with his business.” The man’s eyes lingers on him. “That’s what family is. We keep each other safe, offer advice, even when it’s unwelcome, and when Wil *still* insists that he wants to keep you around that means I’ll drive an hour out at two am to pick up his new *friend* because he was worried.”

Tommy stares at him and Techno meets his gaze with a levelled one of his own.

“Wilbur’s judgement is clouded when it comes to you, and I believe it’s a mutual thing, and there’s not much I can do about it now except deal with it. It’s not pity, I don’t care for you, I have no sympathy for you, what I care about is that I don’t know anything about you and that makes you a potential threat to my brother.”

And this- *this* Tommy *understands*.

Not emotions. Not pity. Just hard judgement and a threat assessment that isn’t wrong.

He mentally places Techno in his own position, Wilbur in Dream’s and-

His shoulders loosens, watching the other with a new appreciation that gains him an eyebrow raising in question.

It’s something he can respect but he can’t let go of Wilbur, not now, not without Dream there to catch and pull him up in the aftermath.

“*Humanity is selfish,*” Dream tells him, rain falling above them both, his head resting on his mentor’s outstretched thigh, hands pressing wet and bloody against his lower hip where he’s slowly bleeding out. “...*Perhaps I’m the most selfish of them all.*”

His mentor’s hood had been pulled back, blond hair turning dark, limp and plastered wet against his head from the heavy rainfall, Tommy’s breath rasping, his vision blurry as he stares up at the drops of water trailing down his masked face.

If you’re selfish, Tommy remembers thinking, thoughts sluggish from bloodloss and only half-lucid when Sapnap appears, swearing as he slides down on his knees beside them, words furious and loud even as his powers flares, flames shifting from orange to something white hot and dangerous with a horrible kind of guilt that he tries to smile to, *then what the hell does that make me?*

“You smell of secrets,” the man tells him.

Tommy scrunches his nose. “What do secrets smell like?”

“Like poorly concealed angst,” Techno says, voice flat, a wry twist to his lips when Tommy chokes on a noise caught between skepticism and startled amusement that dies quickly with a downward curl of his lips.

"I don't want to hurt Wilbur," Tommy says and he wills the other to believe him as he raises his chin and keeps his gaze without bristling anger or defensiveness, without snark or walls. "I mean that."

Techno's eyes are unreadable, something Tommy doesn't understand in the setting of his jaw and harsh breath before he looks away, out the window, at the snow falling from the sky in the dark night where the car sits side-ways in the middle of the street from the abrupt stop.

"That doesn't mean you won't," the man says finally. "You're angry and defensive, closed-off and two steps away from lashing out at any given moment." A gloved hand, set at the bottom of the steering wheel, slides against the leather before stilling, curling tight. "If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you-"

"-know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer defeat." Tommy's mouth stretches out with a flash of teeth. "If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle."

"Sun Tzu, the Art of War." Techno's gaze is appraising. "You understand where I'm coming from." It's not a question.

"I'm not your enemy, Techno." The words tastes strange in his mouth and he kicks a foot out, slumping further into his seat. "I can't tell you anything," he bites out. "So fucking shove it."

"*Can't* or *won't*?" Techno challenges with a searching look.

"Can't," Tommy swallows thickly. "I *can't* because it would mean betraying everything I stand for and I *can't do that*. I made a promise." He draws a breath, letting it out slowly. "I made a promise," he repeats. "I won't break it, not for you, not for Wilbur, not for *anything*."

"*Loyalty*," Techno tastes the word, one hand reaching for the key in the engine and twisting it with a low rumble of the car, lights flickering on. "I guess we aren't so different, you and I."

The car rolls into motion and Tommy paws for the blanket, pulling it up into his lap with a clumsy pull, a heavy sort of weight in his chest as he peers towards Techno who is silent, thumb tapping absently against the wheel, eyes focused ahead.

A strange grimace passes over his face, eyes narrowing, a thumb raising to press against his temple, trailing down the arch off his jaw before settling back on the steering wheel with a sigh.

"You can trust Wilbur, you know?" Techno says finally, the road dark ahead of them, lit only by the cast from the front lights of the car. "And if it's something you feel like you can't bring to him there's always me and Phil. We're not the sort to just leave a kid on their own if they need help."

"*I owe him a lot*," Ranboo had said when he spoke about Techno, a flushed sort of admiration in his tone and voice.

Tommy turns his head to the window, fingers creasing tight in the soft red fabric in his lap.

“You’re only as alone as you make yourself, kid,” Techno says, voice softening with a low exhale. “Trust me when I say that.”

And perhaps it would be true for anyone else, but Tommy can’t afford trust, can’t afford weaknesses, his tongue bound by secrets that would only bring danger to those involved.

He’s truthful when he says he doesn’t want to hurt Wilbur but he can’t promise he won’t because Tommy is meant for more than work at a café, no matter how warm it is, no matter how his heart aches strangely at the thought of leaving it, and Wilbur-

Wilbur has his *family*. An overprotective brother who loves him fiercely, kindly and protectively, and a father who looks at him with warm eyes, and a group of *friends but not friends* who can take his place once he’s gone.

Tommy has nothing without Dream. *Is* nothing.

This is all just temporary and Wilbur- Wilbur will be *fine* and Tommy will be back at Dream’s side, where he belongs.

“Keep your friends close, and your enemies closer.”

Techno’s ear flicks. “... ‘Appear weak when you are strong, and strong when you are weak’.”

“Are you calling me *weak*?” Tommy snaps his head towards him.

“A hit dog will holler,” Techno says after a beat.

“And now you’re calling me a dog,” Tommy says, disbelief bleeding into his voice. “What’s next-“

“A shot goose-“

“No-“ Tommy squawks in protest. “I’m stop or- or I’m telling Wilbur you’re *bullying me*.”

Techno’s mouth twitches, his grip on the steering wheel easing. “Oh, you’re telling *Wilbur*, are you?”

“I- just, shut up,” Tommy’s face burns and he turns to scowl out the window, pausing. “Techno?”

“What?”

“You’ve gone the wrong direction, big man.”

“No,” Techno says easily. “I am bringing you exactly where I promised Wil I’d take you.”

“And where’s that?”

“Home.”

-

“‘Appear weak when you’re strong, and strong when you’re weak’,” Dream reads from the book open in his left hand, bandages fingers tapping thoughtfully against the page as Tommy stretches out to flop down in his lap. “‘Treat your men as you would your own beloved sons, and they will follow you into the deepest valley-’”

“What are you on about now?” Tommy mumbles against the couch cushion.

“I’m reading the Art of War by Sun Tzu,” his mentor informs him distractedly, a hand slipping down to scratch against his scalp, Tommy’s mouth snapping shut as he goes boneless with a tired content noise.

“Sounds fancy.” Tommy tilts his head just so and Dream lets out a short laugh, fingers sliding obligingly over the spot.

“Listen to this one- ‘In the midst of chaos there is also opportunity’.”

“How would there be opportunity in chaos?”

“It’s about using the momentum of your opponent against them, lure them into your playing field and strike in the midst of conflict.” Dream tilts his head. “Chaos is... a distraction. When there’s chaos there’s no chance for your opponent to stop and think. It throws their plans out the window, and it forces them to react to the situation at hand. And if you know how people will react-“

“-you can use it against them,” Tommy hums. “Sounds like you.”

“I was thinking it rather sounds like you.” Dream flicks his ear. “You have a way of thinking on your feet that catches even me off-guard. You’re good at utilizing unpredictable situations.”

“Even you, huh,” Tommy says, voice dry.

“Oh come on now, a bit of an ego is good for the soul,” Dream teases. “And I’m trying to give you a compliment so take it.”

“It’s more like, I create the chaos, and you navigate through it.” Tommy rolls over on his back, staring up at his mentor. “I mean, I’m good at working with it but, I’m following your orders.” The hand on his head has stilled, green eyes peering down at him with an unreadable look. “I create the chaos and you utilize it. We’re a team, Dream.”

“We do make a good team,” his mentor says after a long moment, book closing shut before being thrown aside on the couch. “The media is going to have a field day with you when you’re a Hero.” Dream frames his chin thoughtfully with his thumb and index finger. “As your mentor, it should be me who picks your Hero name, right?”

“No,” Tommy denies instantly. “You’re absolutely shit at naming things.”

“Now that’s just rude.” Dream’s gaze turns gentle, eyes green and soft, nose speckled with freckles that makes him look younger than he is even with his height and broad shoulders. *“I did a good job naming you, didn’t I?”* His index finger bops teasingly against Tommy’s nose and-

Something thick and horribly warm floods through him, filling his chest, lungs and heart, caught beneath the gaze of his mentor, his friend, his-

“You named yourself Dream and then stuck me with the most mundane name possible.”

“Oh come on-!”

“I mean, really, absolutely no flare for the dramatics with me, oh no, we’re picking Tommy, fucking Tommy-” He pokes an accusing finger into his mentor’s chest, grin spreading across his lips as the older flushes with a sputter of denial. *“You better do a good job with my Hero name, I refuse to be stuck with something like, I don’t fucking know, fucking Patches-”*

“W-whAT kind of Hero name is Patches!?” Dream’s voice rises in pitch, half-choked in wheezing laughter.

“It’s absolutely something ridiculous you’d pick, Dream, don’t you fucking deny it-”

-

It’s only months later he steps into the world as Red Chaos, his mentor’s hand warm on his shoulder, flashes going off around them both as Dream’s voice rings steady and sure over the murmur of curious voices.

You’ll change this world, Dream.

Tommy raises his chin to the sea of flashing lights and there’s no doubt in his heart, only a firm sort of grounding security in knowing that he belongs here, at his mentor’s side.

And I’ll be with you every step of the way.

-

Tommy slides out of Techno’s car, sneakers hitting the ground, the night dark around them, light bright in the windows.

The door to the house is already opening and he raises his head, swallowing as Wilbur appeared, dressed in that familiar yellow sweater, fringe all mussed up, a cup clutched in his hand.

“Gremlin delivery,” Techno greets, stepping past him and stealing the coffee. “Thank you for the payment.”

“What- yes, sure-“ Wilbur answers distractedly as the door closes shut, eyes on Tommy who shrinks on himself as the man steps towards him. “Tommy-“ He halts, head tilting, eyes

dragging over his form, something hesitant in the hand that twitches at his side. “Are you- are you okay?”

Tommy looks at him, throat snaring tight. “I’m tired, Wilbur.” His lip trembles, fingers curling tight in the sleeves of his puffy jacket. “I’m really, really tired.”

Wilbur considers him and then he’s folding down on the wooden stairs of the porch, patting the spot beside him, and Tommy stumbles forward to sit down, hunching on himself with a rough swallow as he looks out at the snowy yard, finger hidden in the thick sleeves of his jacket.

An arm settles gently over his shoulders and he clenches his hands tight, body tipping with the small tug that draws him gently against Wilbur’s side.

“Rough day, huh?” the man murmurs, soft, a threading whisper of something in his voice that makes Tommy squeeze his eyes tight. “I’m a bit upset with you, Toms,” Wilbur confides and he tenses. “But that’s just because I was worried.” Fingers twines through the strands at his neck, gentle, always so gentle. “I need you to understand that.”

Tommy isn’t a child. He’s Red Chaos, trained to stand among the best of the best, at his mentor’s side as an equal. But Wilbur draws him like a moth to flame with his strange open affection and it twists him up inside, makes his nose thick, a lump in his throat as he swallows.

You’re not supposed to worry, Tommy thinks in a strange flare of anger and misery alike because he’d fought and clawed and struggled to be someone to be relied on and it feels like everything is slipping through his fingers and his bravado bleeds at the edges.

He *needs* Dream. His mentor would know what to say, what to do, how to make Tommy feel like *Tommy* again and-

“Toms?”

“You make everything so complicated,” Tommy complains thickly as he turns his head, burying against the yellow sweater. “It’s-“ His voice breaks. “It’s so fucking *confusing*.”

“What is?” Wilbur prods, arm drawing him closer.

“*Everything*,” Tommy bites out with a miserable half-choked laugh in his throat. “*I miss him*.” Wilbur stills. “I miss him so much it *hurts*, Wilbur.”

“Who?” A small waver, fingers tightening just an inch against the back of his neck, Wilbur’s face brushing against the side of his head. “Who, Tommy?” he coaxes gently.

But Tommy shakes his head, pressing closer as his eyes burns.

Wilbur’s thumb strokes warm down his neck. “Why were you out there today, Tommy?”

“Because I hate my apartment,” he bites out, one hand tangling in the back of Wilbur’s sweater. “I hate it *so fucking much*.”

“Why?”

“Because,” he mutters petulantly into the yellow fabric.

“*Tommy.*”

Vulnerability means trust, trust means weaknesses, and Tommy cannot allow weaknesses. But Wilbur’s presence and Dream’s absence paints a war in his soul, creasing it with doubts and insecurities alongside a hollowness he’d long thought gone since his days on the street.

“Because it’s fucking *empty*,” Tommy admits roughly, his friend’s scent thick in his nose, ash and the faint clinging of nicotine smoke mixing with his cologne and something that is entirely Wilbur who is warm against his side in the cold night. “And silent,” he says with a rough swallow. “I hate the silence the most.”

Wilbur hums and Tommy feels the way the edge of his smile curls against his temple. “Well, I might just have a solution to at least one of your problems,” he declares, hand dragging up Tommy’s neck to tousle his hair as he shifted, ignoring Tommy’s tired grunt of complaint as he rose up. “But right now it’s late and I think you’re in need of some sleep or you’re gonna be a very grumpy child in the morning.”

“Not a child,” Tommy complains reflexively with a huff.

Wilbur smiles at him, a small warm curl of his lips he offers his hand, palm up, fingers long and elegant, skin slightly red from the cold and callouses visible on the pads. “You can borrow some of my clothes again.”

It’s an offer and promise of not having to go back to his apartment and Tommy reaches out, grasping his hand, letting himself be pulled up and-

There’s a sudden wild flare of desperation to hold on making him tighten his grip to a brief flicker of brown eyes, fingers twitching in the aborted motion to let go of him before they curled warm and firm around his cold ones with a squeeze.

“What do you say about some hot chocolate?” Wilbur asks as he’s tugged into the house, past the dim cast of the porchlight and into the welcoming warmth.

“... I’d like that.”

Chapter End Notes

New chapter pog.

This was actually all done last week but I had to spend eight hours in a car between two dogs to head down for a funeral. And then eight hours back up home again. My back knows only pain.

But, anyway, I'm here so let's gooooo!

Did I manage to surprise you all? I know you were all gearing up for Wilbur content and here I dropped Techno content on your heads.

Sometimes you just have to go pick up your brother's new feral child because said brother is busy elsewhere. Life be like that.

I know a lot of you have been curious about the bracelet and I meant to slip in a good description of it here to clarify some things but Tommy wasn't quite in a state to focus on it past what you got above (had the same issue last chapter). But- next one for sure I'll give you a more visual in-depth one because I know you're all curious and we're at that point of the story.

I'm gonna go stretch out my back on that note and catch up with Techno's latest stream which looks absolutely killer.

Your comments, love and speculations makes my day, truly <3 Much love from me to you :)

-

We've got so much cool art!! My dudes!! I'm just gonna collect the links below, go check it out and give them some love. It's amazing and I'm so, so very soft and happy. Absolutely vibing.

ART:

[Learning to cook by owlwinter8 for chapter 2](#)

[Are we friends Wilbur by owlwinter8 for chapter 3](#)

[You Got Me a Christmas Present by lilacadaisy for chapter 3](#)

[THIS IS OUR POGTOPIA by hiblue for chapter 4](#)

[Red Chaos by fridges](#)

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

He's eight when he meets Dream.

Or at least, he thinks he is.

He has nothing, *is* nothing.

He doesn't even have a name.

The clothes he wears are a ragged, stolen or dug out of trash, his skin covered in dirt and his hair a dark limp mess that dangles down in front of hollow eyes.

He's wary, he's distrustful, he's anger that burns rotten from his very core with blood from a boy not much older than him staining his teeth as he bares them, more animal than human, surviving on fight or flight instincts that coils beneath his skin.

Dream is thirteen, wrist bleeding and hand extended.

He takes him in when the rest of the world was content to leave him to die.

-

"You look like a Tommy to me."

The water around him is dirty, warm in a way he has never experienced, knobby knees drawn up, arm wired tight around them as he stares at the boy who sits beside the bathtub with arms folded on top of the white edge, drowning in a lime green hoodie too big on him.

His hair is blond, short with a bit of a wave, freckles smattering over a proud nose and spilling down his cheeks beneath eyes as green as the leaves on the trees in early spring.

There's a wrap of white bandages around his wrist, just visible beneath the edge of his sleeve.

"Do you want to stay here with me, Tommy?"

He looks away, down at the water, drawing his arms tight around himself.

-

Dream's apartment is small with only a single bed, a couch that has seen better days shoved in front of a small bulky television, the appliances that pile in his kitchen odd and mismatched. Instead of knick-knacks and decorations there are books and more books piling in heaps and corners and a laptop that always glow white with numerous tabs open on it.

Dream sleeps on the floor for the first few weeks, beside the bed as Tommy lies awake, curled up on his side and staring down at the strange teen who'd taken him in.

He kicks the covers down on top of him and turns to curl up with his back to the other boy only to wake up with it draped over him without fail every morning.

-

The first hoodie Dream gives him is red, too big where it pools on him, sleeves tugged down like paws over his hands and hoodie pulled low to shadow his face as he sits curled up at the other's side, staring at the paper in front of him.

"That's your name," Dream tells him, tapping a pen against the five curling shapes.

"What about yours?" It's the first words he speaks to the other who jerks in surprise, green eyes darting towards him as Tommy's lips draws into a thin line, shoulders hunching tighter. *"Show me,"* he demands, voice hoarse and rasping.

Dream stares at him for a moment longer and then his lip quirks.

-

That night Tommy clutches the piece of paper he'd torn out from the notebook, staring down at the ten strange symbols that represent more than he can put into words.

T O M M Y

D R E A M

"Tommy," he tries out quietly in a hushed whisper, tongue darting out to wet against his lips. *"Dream."* He swallows, drawing his knees tighter against his chest in the empty room, one ear on the running shower. *"Tommy and Dream."*

It feels like a promise, it feels like something new, something he doesn't understand but desperately wants to.

-

Dream is tall for his age, looks older than he is, shoulders broad and proud and eyes bright.

Tommy is short and malnourished, eyes dull and he's hunched on himself more times than he's not, skulking in Dream's footsteps like a strange shadow.

"You don't need to wait for me, you know?" Dream tells him as he closes the door behind himself and Tommy peers around the corner of the kitchen, noting the paleness of his cheeks and the slight limp to his steps despite his best attempt to hide it. *"You should go out, make some friends. There's a playground not far from here."*

"I don't need friends," Tommy tells him with a scowl. *"I just need you."*

Dream pauses where he'd bent down to peel his sneaker off, straightening up with a look at him, mouth opening-

But he closes it shut with a sigh because it's an old argument between them at this point because Tommy is nine and he's stubborn to a fault.

"Let's go to the playground then, you and I," Dream says, one hand raising to rub against the back of his neck and Tommy perks up, peering hopefully at him. *"Come on,"* he jerks his head, a small tired but genuine smile on his lips and Tommy scrambles towards him with a grin.

Dream disappears for hours on end some days, leaving Tommy to his own device inside the apartment with books that tells of worlds that are both magical and wondrous.

They're picked out from the library, mixing with books on math and grammar, history and all sorts of odd topics that had caught Dream's attention during their weekly book haul trips.

He tells Dream about the most recent one he'd finished as the warm summer wind whips around them both, and he's careful to keep his steps to match the other's and not speed up despite the excitement wiring through him as the playground gets closer and closer with each step.

"And they're like half-fish and half-human, Dream, isn't that just the coolest? At first I thought it meant that their heads were like, the fist part, because they were supposed to make this eerie noise to lure stupid men down to drown, ya know? But then I searched it up and there were just a lot of half-naked ladies which was a bit weird, not gonna lie-"

Dream chokes on a startled wheeze beside him and Tommy grins, proud of himself as they trade asphalt for sand and he wastes no time peeling his shoes and socks off, discarding them aside, practically vibrating with excitement as he darts for the swings.

It's late, moon high in the sky above them and they're the only ones on the playground, the chains cold beneath his hands as he grasps them tight and pushes off with his feet, the beating of his heart picking up as it moves beneath him, bare toes making patterns in the soft sand.

The chain of the swing beside him jangles as Dream drops down on it.

"Have you ever been on a swing before?" Dream asks as Tommy uses his legs to propel himself backwards, curling them up as he uses the momentum to swing back and forth until it slows down until he's almost a stop before repeating it.

He's watching Tommy with a contemplative tilt of his head and Tommy thins his lips and looks away.

After a beat there's another jangle of metal and soft steps behind him and then there's a lurch, his hands curling tight as he darts his head back to look at the older boy who is grasping his chains.

“Hold tight,” Dream says as he drags Tommy back and then he propels him forward, his stomach swooping as he goes high and then back, Dream’s hands finding his back and pushing him forward, sending him higher and higher with every push until it feels like he’s *flying*.

He’s nine, feet bare and stretching out in front of him, wind whipping past him.

“Higher,” he gasps breathlessly. *“Higher, Dream, higher!”*

Dream is fourteen and grinning, a limp to his feet and bags beneath his eyes and Tommy-

Tommy thinks that, for the first time in his life, he understands what it’s like to be *happy*.

Because of *Dream*.

It’s all because of Dream.

-

Dream lies face down on the bed, head turned and resting against the fold of his arms, eyes on the wall when Tommy cracks the door open and peers inside.

He doesn’t as much as twitch as Tommy closes the door behind himself, padding on bare feet to the bed with an armful of a first-aid kit and bandages that he carefully dumps out before hoisting himself up and settling down on his Dream’s lower back.

Green eyes flicks briefly to him in acknowledgement and then away again, the tension in his back slowly easing as Tommy’s fingers presses against his skin, tracing down between rough hard splits of his flesh, violence painted deep.

“They’re gonna scar,” Tommy tells him bluntly, ten-years-old, reaching for the bottle of disinfectant and popping it open, pouring the solution onto a clean rag.

“I know,” Dream answers with a rough exhale when Tommy presses it down, wiping away the blood that had bled sluggishly after the shower with sure motions, a rippling tension along Dream’s spine the only reaction when he wipes over a particularly deep one on his left. *“Tommy-“*

“Save it,” he mutters, fingers clenching in the rag but careful as he pinches skin together, making sure he could stitch it together. *“I already know what you’re going to say and I don’t care, Dream, I really fucking don’t.”* Dream closes his eyes, head turning to burrow into the pillow below him. *“Besides, it’s not like you can stitch them yourself, idiot.”*

He throws the rag on the floor and reaches for the needle and silk, threading it with familiarity and knotting it tight.

“Are you-“

“No numbing,” Dream cuts him off with a flare of panic. *“No-“*

“Alright, alright, calm your tits, man.”

Dream chokes on an exhaled wheeze of surprise and Tommy takes that as a victory as he leans forward, angling the looped needle down, through skin and flesh with a single smooth motion, pulling the thread along, watching as it pulls at the skin.

The knot is easy enough to make, pulling the skin tight together.

“This would be easier with a forceps you know,” Tommy says, mostly to distract as Dream’s muscles ripple with discomfort that he struggles to hide.

“I don’t like the pinching.”

“Yeah, what’s a bit of stabbing when you could get fucking pinched, man, I’d hate that.” His voice is dry, knotting the thread and pulling it tight.

Dream’s hair is wet against the pillow, sticking up oddly where he’d clearly just run a towel through it, and Tommy makes a mental note to clean up the bathroom before turning in for the night.

-

“... This isn’t right, Dream,” he says almost an hour later, desk light turned on and angled to give him something to work with as the sun started to set outside the window.

He’s not even half-way done, Dream’s fingers white-knuckled where they grip onto the pillow, stubbornly silent even with the hard tension of his shoulders and the small trembles that run through him.

“No numbing,” Dream’s voice is weak. *“No numbing, Tommy, no-“*

“I know,” he cuts off. *“I know, Dream. I know.”*

Dream’s voice rasps in his chest and Tommy lifts one hand, scrubbing it roughly over his eyes with a sharp exhale through his nose, gaze flickering momentarily towards the dark letters that sit like a brand at Dream’s neck before he firms his mouth and rethreads the needle.

“I hate them.”

The older doesn’t answer and Tommy pretends not to hear the stuttering of his breath as he starts on a new one, teeth clenching tight as he works.

-

“NO! I– Tommy you can’t be fucking serious!?”

He’s eleven, plates and glasses shattered on the floor, utensils shining dull silver beneath the kitchen light, Dream’s chest heaving with a twist of his lips.

"You can't do this on your own, Dream." He doesn't cower, chin raised and arms crossed, drowning in the hoodie he'd borrowed from the other that slinks over his hands like paws his fingers curl into. *"What's the point of me being here if you won't use me?"*

"You-" Dream turns on his heel and there's a clatter as the toaster hits the floor and Tommy gives it an unimpressed look. *"You don't understand what you're asking!"* Dream's voice is fury and helplessness, his chest bare, a flush stretching from his face and down it. *"You're just a child! A stupid, silly little child who can't even begin to grasp what you're asking of me!"*

"I know exactly what I'm asking!" Tommy's voice tears through the kitchen, mouth curled into a snarl. *"I know, Dream, because I've spent the last three years seeing exactly what it's doing to you!"*

Dream's hand curls around the coffee maker, brand-new and only once used, shoulders heaving with his harsh breathing as he turns away from him, dropping it with a clutter in favour of pressing both palms down against the cold counter.

On his back there's scars, old and new, the stitches Tommy had made stretching with the curl of his spine, two of them torn and bleeding at the edges.

"I took you in to protect you." Dream's voice is rough, broken and choked with too much as Tommy carefully takes a step forward, mindful of the splitter on the ground as he threads his way to the other on socked feet. *"I took you in because I didn't- I didn't want you to go through this fucking shitshow."* Dream's head turns, bright green eyes boring into his. *"Have you ever seen a happy Hero, Tommy?"*

The apartment is a small thing, shared between the two of them with a single bed and a couch that's seen better days in front of a small television, rarely used. There are books crowding in piles, old and new, all sorts of odd topics crowding together, magazines and printed papers with scrawls in the margins from two different hands.

"It's ugly." Dream turns around in a jerky motion of tense muscles before he sinks down on the floor, a smear of red left behind on the white cupboards but he hardly seems to notice. *"The whole Hero business... There's far more going on behind the scenes than the world knows."*

"Obviously." Tommy says smartly, putting one palm on his hip. *"I have fucking eyes you know."*

"You're such a foul-mouthed child." Dream slumps further on himself. *"And stubborn— so goddamn stubborn."*

Dream had been living alone in it, before Tommy, something he understands isn't right even if the apartment is far better than the cold streets that had been his life. He has no parents, no guardians, just a mention of a friend that twists his face with regret and shadows his eyes.

All he has is Tommy.

All Tommy has is Dream.

"You want to change things and I do too." He plops down the floor in front of the other, scrunching too long sleeves together before leaning forward. *"Let me help."*

"You're a child." Dream's voice is weak. *"It's not- this isn't what I wanted for you. I didn't take you in to use you, Tommy!"*

"I know." Tommy meets his eyes unflinchingly and with determination. *"And that's exactly why I trust you to do so."*

-

Tommy stares at himself in the bizarrely large mirror that stretches over the bathtub in the bathroom, his chest bare, a hoodie clutched limply in his hand, shadows dark beneath his eyes.

He's lanky, always has been, boyish in a way that the armour he'd worn beneath his hoodie as Red Chaos had done its best to bulk out and hide. It had been deliberate, a design he and Dream had argued back and forth on until they'd found a good shape that didn't hinder his movement in the way it curled over his shoulders.

He'd been a fast grower, reaching six feet before turning fourteen, and he'd spent early mornings with his chin on his mentor's shoulder, toothbrush hanging limp in his mouth and still half-asleep as Dream fussed over his shaving and creams.

He'd usually woken Tommy with a slather of sunscreen oil over his cheek and he'd enjoyed those moments of companionship even as he grumbled and half-heartedly smoothed it out.

It had been Dream who showed him how to shave when the first awkward little stands appeared on his chin and upper lip, which he'd kept for a good week with some pride before Sapnap had swung by and promptly choked on his laughter at the sight of him.

"Maybe it's a blond thing," Sapnap had hollered through the closed and locked door as Dream prodded him down on the closed toilet seat, arms crossed and mouth twisted down as he kicked a foot out. *"Dream can't grow a beard for shit either."*

He remembers the scent of the shaving cream and the uncomfortable itch where his mentor had applied it liberally with a teasing print left on his nose, and he remembers how Dream had carefully pulled out a case from behind his own, revealing a wooden handle with metal at the base, split in the middle to allow a blade to fold out from it.

"It's a bit trickier than a normal one," Dream had said, one hand rubbing at the back of his neck as Tommy's eyes widened. *"But – a friend taught me how to do it this way and, well, I thought I could show you how now that it's your turn."* The case had been gently grasped, the pads of his fingers stroking over the fine handle. *"I know you're not much for presents but, well, think of it as a necessity."*

He still has it, still uses it, and he remembers how much of an *grown up* he'd felt like when Dream guided him on how to use it, Sapnap offering the occasional advice through the door, music playing tinnily from his phone, an odd mismatch of noise, the only thing in common the looping lyrics with *man* crammed somewhere into it.

Seated on the toilet, his head angled up, the scrape of the knife up his jaw, shaving cream wiped off on a towel, Dream's firm hand guiding his motion with a furrow of concentration above him, green eyes meeting his briefly with a proud grin before the towel wiped over the last of the white foam.

"Look at that, you're practically a man now." The words Sapnap had told him afterwards with a rough ruffle of his hair as he tried to duck past him only to be snagged back with an arm draped over his shoulder. *"This calls for a drink! Right, Dream?"*

There had been no alcohol for Tommy but he'd grinned, sipping his cola as Sapnap and Dream argued over the rules of poker, enjoying their shock when he cleaned them both out and basking in no longer being the *kid*.

After that he'd stood at his mentor's side, shaving alongside him in the morning hours.

He misses it and he kept up his habit of shaving every two or three days, even if he'd never had much growth to begin with, trying desperately not to think about the missing spot beside him.

His hair has definitively gotten longer, curling and sticking up awkwardly in places, his fringe long enough that it would be brushing his nose if it didn't bounce up in a mess of curls that makes him think of Wilbur with his brown wild fluffy mess of a fringe that only got more and more aggravated with every habitual run of fingers through it.

He drags it back behind his head, fingers curling around the small sorry excuse of a ponytail with a huff before dropping it.

Tommy doesn't look like a civilian.

The marks on his skin are too odd, too deliberate, and there's a reason he always wears long-sleeves and hoodies that curl thick around his neck.

Around his right wrist the power suppressor sits in an innocent wrap of silver, unremarkable at first glance, thin and tight against the wrap of scars beneath it and lacking a clasp or visible way to remove it.

He knows that if he drags his thumb along the side of it the enchantments on the underside will glow a dull shine of purple and its warm to the touch, not jarringly so, but enough that it doesn't allow him to forget about it as it sits in a constant reminder of what he'd lost.

He wraps his hand around it, covering it up with a white-knuckled grip, and then he bends down and snatches up his hoodie, tugging it on roughly before sinking down on the bathroom floor and leaning his head back against the door, sleeves tugged over his hands as he hunches on himself.

He wonders what Wilbur would think if he knew that Tommy was Red Chaos whose reputation is bathed in unpredictability, violence and the loyalty of a dog branded on top of him as he stands at Dream's side.

"I'm pathetic." His voice is a ghost of a whisper in the bathroom as he clenches his jaw. *"I miss him so fucking much."*

-

"You said you were upset."

Tommy had ended falling asleep on the bathroom floor, waking up to a knock and a bleary-eyed Wilbur peering down at him in confusion as he pried it open after three hours of sleep.

It's *fine*, because he's gone on less, has done missions on less, but it has left a restless sort of energy in his limbs and his fingers curl and uncurl in the sleeves of the large grey hoodie Wilbur had borrowed him and he can't quite shake it off.

It's warm, hanging loose on him, and despite the fact that the height difference isn't *that* jarring between them it still manages to reach down to his thighs, well used and distractingly soft, Wilbur's scent faint and mixing with the pine of the fabric softener.

Wilbur tips his head back and swallows the last of his third cup of coffee, music playing low on the portable speaker between them, and a cheese toast sits half-mutilated on his plate where he'd torn small pieces off between sips of hot chocolate.

The man had made it in the waffle iron, leaving a lopsided pattern on it, cheese melting down the sides to crust yellow from the time passed, and the kitchen smells of burnt cheese and warm butter.

"Why-" Tommy scowls at the table, teeth dragging against the skin on the inside of his cheek. *"Why* were you upset?" he demands finally, peering up at his friend.

"Upset might have been the wrong word," Wilbur admits, putting one elbow on the table and dropping his cheek into it, fringe messy from sleep, dressed in sweatpants and an old t-shirt that has a hole near the armpit, a long thread dangling from it. "Will you let me be terrifyingly blunt with you for a minute, Toms?"

The sleeves of the hoodie are long enough that he's made them into sweater paws, thumbs rubbing against the ribbed ends as he considers the other.

"All cards on the table." Wilbur draws a breath and then releases it, and Tommy observes the nervous twitching of his fingers, the way tension settles in his shoulder even as his body-language remains mostly relaxed. "I think we need to clear the air a bit, don't you agree?"

Tommy tilts his head with a flare of curiosity and wariness alike. "Okay," he agrees.

The other studies him and then gives a sharp nod.

“You live on your own,” Wilbur says after a moment of silence, clearly gathering his thoughts together with the pinch of his brows that smooths out with a sigh. “You’re clearly used to taking care of yourself, and I don’t doubt that you *can*, but- you’re sixteen, you shouldn’t *have to*.” Brown eyes, warm eyes, looking at him and only him. “When Quackity called he said that he had to force you to agree to letting him call me.”

Wilbur shifts, leaning back in his chair and crossing his arms as he tips his head back up to stare at the ceiling and Tommy curls his fingers tight in the fabric but remains silent.

“You were far from home, in the middle of the night, with people you knew nothing about.” Wilbur’s long fingers drums against his bicep. “I guess, I don’t understand why you didn’t call me yourself,” he says finally, head tipping down to focus on him with a flicker of emotions Tommy doesn’t understand. “And then I realised that, maybe you didn’t know that’s a normal expectation to have or that you’re *allowed* to rely on me.” A beat. “That I *want you* to be able to rely on me.”

Wilbur sinks down in his chair, one long leg stretching out beneath the table.

“There’s so much I don’t know about you, Tommy. So much I don’t necessarily understand or know how to approach you about.” A complicated curl of his lips. “I’m used to being listened to, the work I do puts me in charge of a lot of things, and I’m used to being the one responsible. But I also have Phil and Techno to lean back against. I know they have my back, always.” Wilbur’s brown eyes burn into his. “I want to be that for you but I don’t know how to do that without making a mess of things.”

Fingers drags roughly through the wild curls of his fringe, clenching down with a self-deprecating smile that Tommy can’t look away from.

“I’m *selfish*. I’m possessive, I don’t like sharing and I need to be in control.” Something dark glimmers in his eyes. “I want to know everything there is to know about you, to carve you open and bare, to make you tell me all there is to know. I want to know what makes you sad, I want to know what makes you happy, I want to hear you laugh, cry, I want to hear you *scream*.” Wilbur’s mouth curves with too much teeth. “I want to be the one you turn to when you’re sad, when you’re lost, when you’re hurt, when you don’t know what to do or where to go.” Wilbur pushes up, slumping forward on the table, closer now with the gleam of his eyes. “I want to you to trust me, wholly and utterly.”

The words makes Tommy shiver, something curving possessive and jarring through him with a rasp in his breathing, throat thick when he swallows.

Because there’s a shift in Wilbur’s body-language, something he’d known instinctively was there but had never *seen*, not like this, intense and consuming with the way he looks at him.

It’s so different from Dream who cautions from attachments and who keeps him at a distance even when he allows him closer than anyone else.

Dream who hides behind a mask and crumbles in the silence of the four walls of his apartment as Tommy bares his teeth jagged and stubborn at his side as he takes just a bit of that weight to carry with him.

“And see, Tommy, that’s what concerns me,” Wilbur says with a laugh. “That you *liked* hearing that, that you *want* to hear that.” His eyes glitters. “It’s addictive and heady, to watch the way you respond to me, how much you crave my touch, how ready you are to twist yourself inside out just to be near me.” Wilbur breathes in, chest expanding and then sinking back with a harsh exhale. “Do you know what it does to me, knowing that you’ve looked at someone else with those same eyes? How it keeps me up at night?”

“*That kind of loyalty can’t be bought for money.*” Schlatt’s eyes burns in his memory, filled with fury and hunger alike as he looks at him, at Dream’s side. “*How did you do it?*”

“You’re vulnerable, Toms.” Wilbur breathes in with a flaring of his nose. “Vulnerable and bleedings at the seams, desperate for someone to fill the spot or someone you were loyal to because you don’t know how to cope on your own. *I see you.* I see how much you’re struggling, how much you’re fighting to keep hold of your last bits of sanity, and I want to be the person who glues it all together again.”

There’s a moment of silence, Tommy staring at Wilbur, Wilbur looking right back at him, searching his eyes for something Tommy doesn’t understand before his body-language shifts, softening, the sharp glimmer in his eyes turning warm as he lets out a sigh and Tommy draws a breath.

“But I also want to see what kind of person you’d be, standing on your own two feet. How brilliant you’d shine, given the right guidance and support. You’re so *young*, and I know you hate to hear it, but that’s the truth. No child should have eyes like yours, no child should be so willingly to give themselves so completely to someone that their absence makes them crumble. And yet, that is what you’ve done and here you sit before me in the aftermath.”

Tommy hadn’t thought himself so bare beneath the eyes of the man before him but Wilbur isn’t wrong and his words aren’t frightening as much as they are addictive.

“What does it say about that man you miss when you’re drawn to all the ugly sides of me?” Wilbur muses, eyes bright and intense of him, such a lovely shade of brown. “I’m not a good person, Tommy. I’m human, flawed, perhaps in more ways than most.” A beat. “I know what I’m like... and that’s the issue.”

“You can’t leave me,” Tommy says in the small kitchen as one song fades into the next.

“No,” Wilbur agrees with a tilt of his head. “I don’t think I can, and more importantly, I don’t want to.”

Tommy hums, satisfied as he relaxes his grip on the fabric he’d bunched tight, kicking one leg out.

“I don’t mind that you think like that,” he tells the older earnestly. “I like it.”

“I know,” Wilbur agrees with a curl of his lips.

“Don’t make yourself out to be the bad guy, Wilbur,” Tommy pronounces with a deliberate emphasis to a flash of *something* in brown eyes. “I’m not some kind of perfect lost little

golden boy you can paint in pretty strokes. I don't like people and people don't like me." His mouth curves with teeth. "You're making a mistake if you think I'm *soft*."

He has the world thirsting for his blood, Villains and Heroes alike, his name dragged through the mud in the mouths of civilians in the aftermath of the clusterfuck that had turned his life on its head.

Red Chaos isn't a beloved Hero.

He's a traitor, exiled for a betrayal he doesn't understand or can grasp at because he'd done exactly what he'd been told to do and yet somehow ruined it all.

"I guess we're both a bit fucked-up," Tommy decides as he eases back and it startles a laugh out of Wilbur, high and melodic, his head tipping back, and Tommy thinks that it's one of the best things he's heard. "I'll call you, next time," he promises as an afterthought.

"That's-" The man drops both elbows on the table and sets his chin in the middle of his framed palms with a twitch of his lips. "That's so not the issue here, sunshine." Fond, warm, a new nickname that Tommy wants to hear again and again and again.

"Then we'll figure things out," Tommy shrugs. "Together."

"Yeah?" Wilbur's eyes glimmers. "That's your solution?"

"You can't force me to something I don't want." Tommy cocks his head. "And you don't want to force it out of me because you want to me to trust you."

"I do," the other agrees without a hint of hesitation. "You have secrets, Toms, and I want to know them all."

"You have secrets too," he says with a measuring look. "You're an odd one, Wilbur Soot."

There's an understanding there between them and Tommy grins a sharp and jagged thing as Wilbur sinks down, arms folding on the table, chin resting against them.

"You'll call?"

"I'll call," Tommy assures him and it's a surprisingly easy thing to promise.

"Okay," Wilbur breathes out. "And if I overstep, if I push your boundaries too much- I want you to tell either me, Techno or Phil. Can you promise me that, Tommy?"

Tommy considers that, Wilbur watching him patiently.

"That's harder to promise," he says finally. "If you didn't push my boundaries we wouldn't be here."

Wilbur breathes in hard, and then out, his mouth tipping down to press against the fold of his arms, brown eyes glittering.

“You trust me.”

“I trust no-one,” Tommy bites out sharply. “... But you’re my friend. That means something, right?”

“It does,” Wilbur agrees gently.

“Yeah,” Tommy says quietly before he grimaces. “I can try.” He curls his sweater paws over the edge of the chair between his legs and leans forward with a narrowed look. “But that goes for you too, Wilbur. I might be young but that doesn’t make me stupid and it doesn’t mean I have to be babied. If you want to do this properly it’s gonna be a two-way street.”

“You want to be relied on.”

“I do,” Tommy agrees, baring his teeth in a grin. “See, I like it when you’re blunt with me, no pussyfooting around shit or pretending it isn’t there.”

“Techno would kill me if he knew,” Wilbur laughs. “There’s a reason I waited until he and Phil were both gone to have this conversation with you.” His head tilts. “Most are uncomfortable around me, you know that Toms? It’s why I don’t have friends. I have colleagues and I have people who like me until they see the ugly sides of me.”

“I don’t think they’re ugly.” Tommy cocks his head. “You’re just Wilbur.”

“*Just Wilbur.*” He tastes the words carefully, something like wonder in the curve of his smile as he looks at Tommy and-

My Wilbur; a part of Tommy whispers possessive and warm with jagged teeth that yearns for impossible things.

“You’re something else, Toms,” Wilbur murmurs and he slots his eyes back on the man.

“Anyone ever tell you that?”

“Yes,” he says bluntly but- “minus the nickname,” he tacks on when the other’s mouth dips.

Wilbur perks up. “So, I’m the *first* to call you Toms?”

“Mm-hm.”

“... Do you like the nicknames?” Wilbur pursues carefully.

He gives a small jerky nod.

“Good,” Wilbur breathes. “*Good.* I’m glad, Toms.”

He grunts, averting his eyes as he sinks deeper into his hoodie.

“You’re a terribly endearing child,” his friend tells him.

It's a late Friday morning in January, sun shining through the window, casting a stream of light over the wooden table between them, lightening the eyes of the man opposite him.

“And you’re a not so terrible adult,” Tommy says with a curl of his lips.

Chapter End Notes

Hi, hello, welcome back to Hush Now

I wrote this chapter while looping creature by half-alive if you want a song rec :)

Tommy and Wilbur hashes some things out, away from the ears of the rest of the world, because communication is good and... uh, healthy. Yes.

I also just looked at the word count and was like, bruh.

This is gonna be a journey so strap in tight.

You people are absolutely amazing and I cannot express that enough. I got stuck writing this and I took a break to reread your encouragements and speculations and it's a bit of a wonder to see all of you so engaged in this story.

I also made a tumblr [corpse-art](#) to share the fanart and updates and stuff on if you're interested, which I know a fair few of you have been :)

On that note I'mma drop this on you guys and take a long nap after some stretching.

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We've got so much cool art!! My dudes!! I'm just gonna collect the links below, go check it out and give them some love. It's amazing and I'm so, so very soft and happy. Absolutely vibing.

ART:

[Learning to cook by owlwinter8 for chapter 2](#)

[Are we friends Wilbur by owlwinter8 for chapter 3](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[Tommy doesn't look like a civilian by owlwinter8 for chapter 9](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[You Got Me a Christmas Present by lilacadaisy for chapter 3](#)

[THIS IS OUR POGTOPIA by hiblue for chapter 4](#)

[Red Chaos by fridges](#)

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Sapnap scrolls down his contacts, thumb pausing over the small blue dot with a tallying number of unanswered messages from Tommy.

Just tell me what I did wrong.

The latest one stares back at him, the tonal change and clear shift to self-blame leaving a sour taste in his mouth.

He grimaces, turning it off and slipping it back into his pocket before slumping back on the couch of their house, eyes drifting over the stone ceiling.

It's slanted, the work of Quackity who had presented it to them with a nervous smile and a ruffled look of the dark hair sticking out beneath his beanie.

He hadn't said it, but it was clear that he'd built it himself, every wall and stone measured to be put there by hand, the end result a quirky mix that reflects the three of them.

It's in the stone that won't accidentally catch on fire because of his powers, in the high ceilings, because Quackity's wings might be small but bird hybrids thrived in open spaces, and the living room that lowered down into large square mattress couch where Karl would belly flop down only to promptly roll himself into a cocoon of blankets.

Home, that's the word for it, paved together by a man who had once been his enemy. Butter yellow wings fluffing out from behind his shoulders, soft and still downy from his latest moulting, a flush to his cheeks as he sunk to his knee to present them both with a box containing three golden rings.

Quackity. *Jester*. The owner of the largest casino in L'Manberg, the bright neon sign of *Las Nevadas* blinking amidst marble and gold that made up the extravagant building that stood out from the dour greys of L'Mangerg.

A surface of business that hid the large underground network of information that his fiancé ruled amidst.

It had been chance that brought them together. A Villain with his face split open and bleeding, hands desperately pressing against it, blinking blindly through rivulets of blood where he'd slumped back against the bricks of Sapnap's apartment complex.

Jester had always been clever words and quick wit the few times he'd seen him and it had felt *wrong* to see him like that, the proud man half-delirious and choking on blood as Sapnap made a split-decision to haul him up over his shoulder.

"I should have known fucking with the Blood God was a bad idea," Jester had gasped into his ear with a wheezy laugh. *"Fucking hell, man, he actually took my eye out."*

That had been almost two years ago and things had changed, Jester now part of the Syndicate, working closely with the same man who'd scarred his face so violently, and Sapnap had officially climbed the Hero ranks as Valorant.

He jerks and looks towards the door at the sound of a key rustling to twist the lock open, shoes stomping down to free from the snow clinging to them even before the door pulled wide and Quackity slunk inside with a small shiver as he hurriedly closed it shut behind him.

"There's no way I'm taking a single step outside for at least twenty-four hours," Quackity complains the second his eyes zeroes on Sapnap, hands already yanking to get his jacket off, letting it drop carelessly on the ground as he bent down to tug his shoes off. "It's freaking *cold* out."

"You could get a warmer jacket," Sapnap points out, mouth softening a bit helplessly. "You know, like Karl keeps telling you."

"Don't be like that." There's a whine to his words, a clear tiredness in the fumbling of his hands, one hand dragging his beanie off to run fingers through his dark hair, revealing tufts of yellow feathers just behind his ear openings before it's abruptly tugged back down over them. "Do you know what it's like, trying to herd Tubbo into doing anything when he's in a bad mood?" Quackity's brows knit, gaze far away. "Ram hybrid my ass, kid turns into a feral passive aggressive *cat*."

"Bad mood?" Sapnap pats the space beside him on the couch and Quackity wastes no time in hauling himself over the edge before flumping down on it, squirming until he had his cheek half-mushed against his thigh. "Did something happen?"

"Kinda," Quackity sighs as Sapnap trails his hand down to unbutton the white shirt with deft twists of his hand, and his fiancé grimaces as he has to shift to slink out of it, small wings stretching out with ruffle before they simply folded down alongside his spine with a small shiver.

Sapnap reaches behind him to pull at the soft blanket there, draping it carefully over him with a bit of careful angling to get it up beneath the wings that lifts just an inch to help him along, Quackity's eyes flagging tellingly as he let Sapnap maneuverer him around with a slow relaxing of tense muscles.

He reaches for his powers, carefully warming up his skin and pushing it outwards, just enough to wrap the smaller man in a cocoon of soft warmth. It's a bit tricky- his flames had a way of burning bright and hot, spiralling out of his control if he wasn't careful.

Bad was a full-blood demon, something ancient and remnant of the building stones of their world, and his genes runs through Sapnap with whispers of arson, a desire to let all of it go up in flames.

It's why he'd chosen to become a Hero, to prove both himself and the world wrong, and then he'd met Dream and George and finally Tommy and things had spiralled, becoming more than that, something beyond the simple ideals of his teen self.

"Want to talk about it?" Sapnap lowers his voice, tucking the sides of the blanket in to make sure the smaller man was snug and warm.

"Want to talk about why you're still awake?" Quackity checks, peering up at him with a dip of his brow. "Did you even sleep? It's, like, six am."

"Maybe I just woke up early." Sapnap aims for a smile but it comes out as a tired grimace. "Just... a lot on my mind," he admits when Quackity gives him a sharp look. "And... Karl is out again."

"Again?" Quackity frowns. "He's been disappearing a lot lately."

"I'm worried." Sapnap reaches out to brush a hand over the soft downy feathers, chest twisting when they rose with a small flick against his fingers in response. "He's gonna crash soon if he doesn't slow down."

Quackity's mouth thins. "We'll talk to him."

"Yeah," Sapnap agrees, eyes trailing and stilling on a feather he carefully shifts back in place with a small nudge that gains him a small wince. "When was the last time you preened?"

"After we sleep," Quackity groans. "I really can't be bothered right now, man, and I'm out of oil again."

"You should steal some from Philza." Sapnap slumps back, letting his fingers trail through the feathers in something that is more petting and less preening but still smooths them down and back into place. "I bet he just hoards the stuff."

"With the way his feathers shine? Oh yeah for sure," Quackity laughs tiredly. "He's got his arms full at the moment though."

It's a careful line, discussing Syndicate business.

A sort of *careful* that Sapnap isn't always good at.

It feels clumsy, with the knowledge of how much he *isn't* telling Karl and Quackity, a lump of guilt that settles heavy in his chest.

They know that he's Valorant, high up on the list of Heroes, but they don't know that Valorant is more than involved in a lot of crap and, more importantly, they have no idea that Dream is one of his best friends.

"He's uh-" Quackity's face shifts, eyes drifting momentarily to the wall, staring at it, and then he gives himself a small shake. "You know that kid I mentioned? The one that works at Sam's café?"

“Yeah?”

“He’s involved in more shit than he’s aware of,” Quackity says with a weak laugh. “Kid helped me fix my van tonight, just, appeared out of nowhere and offered to help. And he looked so lost that I kinda- I invited him along to help Ranboo and Tubbo load the van, figured it could do him some good to meet two his own age and- it turned into a bit of a disaster.” Quackity stretches out, hooking his chin on top of Sapnap’s thigh to stare a bit blearily out in front of him. “Sam likes him, wants to help him, and I love Sam, I do, but there’s just... something about the whole situation is making me wary.”

He runs his thumb over the right axillar and Quackity’s wings twitches.

“He’s managed to make friends with Wilbur of all people,” his fiancé admits after a long moment and Sapnap’s hand pauses. “Which, don’t get me wrong, there’s absolutely nothing wrong with that, but the timing of things, with everything going and-“ Quackity let’s out a rough breath. “He’s just a kid.”

And Sapnap doesn’t know what to say to that, guilt thick in his chest as he thinks of *Tommy* with his stubborn and unwavering loyalty, blue eyes bright, wit sharp and biting with a loud barking laugh that had become less and less frequent during the years.

“That’s not all there is to it,” Sapnap fumbles out. “Tubbo and Ranboo are both doing fine.”

“Yeah,” Quackity agrees with a complicated twist of his mouth. “But those two- it’s *different* because it’s safer for them to be where they are now. I know Sam meant well, taking him in and all, but Technoblade keeps his distance, you know? He knows to be careful. Wilbur... Wilbur doesn’t do *distance*.”

Sapnap doesn’t know Siren well-enough to say one way or the other but he’s intense in a way that makes the hair at the back of his neck rise.

“I tried to ask Ranboo what the hell happened,” Quackity complains, voice picking up in speed with his frustration. “But he was just as lost as I was and Tubbo – well, he was being *Tubbo*. And Sam’s kid looked like he was on the brink of a mental breakdown only for *Technoblade* to come and pick him up and I haven’t heard anything since.” His mouth curls without humour. “Wilbur, the fucking asshole, just texted me to say *I’ve got him now* as if that is in any way reassuring.”

Quackity’s sigh is tired.

“Sam’s been dodgy about the whole thing too but I *know* he’s worried and I hate it when it worries and I bet he’s feeling all guilty because *he’s* the one who gave the kid work at his café in the *first place* and now he’s in the house with three of the largest hitting Villains in the whole of goddamn L’Manberg and he doesn’t have a fucking clue.”

He cards his fingers through the feathers of his wings and Quackity closes his eyes, forcing himself to slowly relax, the lines of his tense shoulders easing with an expanding of his ribs before he settled down.

“Technoblade is the one who helped Ranboo, right?” Sapnap ventures carefully. “I mean, it’s not like *bad* that they’re helping some kid.”

“It’s-“ Quackity waves a hand. “It’s complicated,” he says finally, not bothering to look up, voice half-muffled. “There’s a lot going on at the moment and Wilbur is... I like the man, I *do*, but he also terrifies the *shit* out of me and everyone’s been on edge since, well, *you know*.”

I know, Sapnap thinks with an ill-ease curl in his chest and then- *me too*.

Being introduced to the Syndicate hadn’t exactly been a smooth ride. Confronted with the Angel of Death, the Blood God and Siren had been nerve wracking, even when he was a less well-known Hero, and he’s well-aware that he’s being kept at a distance, tolerated at best and regarded with suspicious eyes.

At least Philza seemed to find him amusing, mouth twitching up and humour glinting in his eyes when Sapnap had knocked on his door at three am to ask how the *fuck* he was supposed to preen his boyfriend’s feathers when the other man was as stubborn as a yowling cat about *anyone* getting close to them.

It had been a desperate gamble, tired of seeing Quackity scoff and dismiss their concern, eyes shifty and distrustful with a wary smile.

There’s many reasons as to why Sapnap doesn’t like Schlatt but what he’d done to *Quackity*- he hadn’t been able to take a step into the tower for *months* after Quackity had told them both quietly after a rough night, the anger brewing hot and dangerous beneath his skin at the fucking *mention* of the Number Two Hero.

He’d taken vicious satisfaction in seeing Dream overtake his position as the Number One, to see the ram hybrid get brought down several notches from a twenty-year-old and the scrappy fifteen-year-old at his side.

“*It’s all about the patience, mate,*” Philza had told him, slipping him a jar of oil that Sapnap had stared blankly at as Technoblade regarded him from the couch. “*Wings are sensitive business.*”

“*That’s not very helpful, Phil,*” Technoblade had drawled, eyes flashing blood red, and all Sapnap had been able to think about was the bright colourful skin of poisons frogs. It had been jarring the first time he saw how ridiculously *pretty* the other man was when he wasn’t in his Blood God form and he couldn’t quite shake off how disturbing it was. “*You have to coax them. Make the room warm, comfortable, hell, build a nest. It’s all about enticing their instincts.*”

Actual helpful advice. Sapnap had stammered his thanks and *bowed* for some reason, feeling rather like he’d just escaped death when startled laughter trailed at his heels.

Siren is more... complicated. Wilbur did not like him and the man had made it abundantly clear, eyes sharp and words sharper, a charismatic kind of deadly combination that sent a shiver down his spine.

Sapnap had been staying clear of him for the last few months and he was planning on keeping it that way. Dream would just have to deal with his own messes this time, Sapnap had *warned him the stupid stubborn fool*, and he wants nothing to do with it.

“You heading over to Las Nevadas tomorrow?”

“Unfortunately,” Quackity huffs, the lines of his face softening with the change of topic. “I need to make sure Foolish is actually taking breaks- man keeps overworking himself. I mean, it’s good for the business, but I haven’t seen him sleep *once*.”

“Maybe he and Karl have started a club together,” Sapnap suggests with a grin. “Inside the sleepless walls of *Las Nevadas*,” he drawls out teasingly.

“I’m suing whoever coined that,” Quackity mutters petulantly. “I’m running a casino with a perfectly good hotel with *beds* built into it, and people make are making it sound like I’m squeezing people for money around the clock.”

“Wasn’t there some sort of speculation about you using your power?”

“Last year? Yeah.” His fiancé’s face is flat and Sapnap’s mouth twitches. “That was a whole ass mess,” he bemoans. “My powers don’t even *remotely* have anything to do with messing with people’s sleep. That’s all 404.” Quackity shudders theatrically. “Associating me with a Hero, *really*.”

“We’re not all bad,” Sapnap murmurs, tipping his head back and stretching his legs out.

“You know 404?”

“Kinda,” he admits. “He’s the good sort.”

Quackity’s eyes lingers on him for a minute before sliding away. “I guess, if you say so.”

“I do,” Sapnap presses. “I *do* say so.”

“Do you know Red Chaos?” Quackity ventures carefully and Sapnap draws a sharp breath. “I know we don’t, like, talk Hero and Villain business but... he’s not really a *Hero* anymore, is he?”

“No,” Sapnap says with a heavy feeling in his chest. “No he’s *not*.”

Quackity’s wings rustles on his back, body shifting as he reaches out to find and fold his palm over the top of Sapnap’s hand with an apologetic squeeze. “It’s okay. I shouldn’t have asked.”

“It’s fine,” Sapnap reassures him. “It’s just...”

“Yeah,” Quackity agrees with a strained smile. “No man, I respect it, I do. We all knew what it meant, going into it like this.”

“Hero, Villain and Vigilante,” Sapnap breathes out. “We’re a bit of a hot mess, aren’t we?”

“The *hottest*.”

-

Wilbur’s an atrocious parker, car sideways and leaving just a narrow gap for the driver of the car on the right, and Tommy has to haul himself out the backdoor because the other is already half-way out of the car when he realizes that he’s gonna make no attempt to correct it.

“How the fuck did you get your license?” he demands as he kicks the door shut behind him, peering down the parking lot and the stores that circles around them, unsure exactly as to what the *fuck* kind of solution Wilbur expected to find.

The sun is a bright spot amidst grey clouds above them and when he looks back to Wilbur the man is already half-way down the path to the large hardware store.

Tommy stares after him.

“Motherfucker,” he hisses, scrambling to catch up, sneakers splattering against the wet slush of the ground, and he offers a grimace of apology to the child that he swerves around with a twist of his feet.

He catches up to Wilbur as the man is pulling out a shopping cart with blue handles and Tommy slows his steps as he turns around towards him.

“I hate crowds,” the man tells him, propping his elbows down on the cart handle. “But today we brave a necessary evil.”

Tommy stares at him. “We’re at a fucking *hardware store*, what fucking crowds are you on about?” he grumps out, gesturing towards the single greeter at the door and the old lady slowly making her way inside. “No one’s building *shit* in the middle of winter.”

It’s not even two pm, and Wilbur grins wide and sharp.

“Oh, but neither are *we*.” He straightens out, looking down expectantly at Tommy who narrows his eyes suspiciously. “Get in the cart.”

Tommy stares at him, mouth parting because *fucking what*.

“Hell no,” he decides, turning on his heel.

“*Tommy-*“

“I’m not a fucking child, Wilbur, I-“ He’s cut off with a choked noise of shock as hands slinks beneath his armpits, bodily hauling him high, eyes wide in shock at the sheer fucking *audacity*, and he kicks a leg out indignantly, sending cart careening down the parking lot.

He slowly turns his head to meet Wilbur’s eyes.

“Put me *down*,” he demands, voice coiling dangerous with promise as the cart rolls to bump up against a car, alarm going off in a blaring obnoxious noise and flashing light.

“Or what?” Wilbur challenges, cocking his head.

“I’ll fucking *bite you*,” Tommy promises with a flash of teeth.

-

“How’s paint gonna solve anything?” Tommy wonders, crowding back in the shopping cart to make room for yet another heavy bucket of paint. “I mean, it’s a bit of a shit solution if you think painting one of my walls *buttercup yellow* is magically gonna make my apartment more bearable.”

“Trust the process, Toms!” Wilbur hollers, already half-way down the aisle with his ridiculously long legs. “I have a *plan*!”

Tommy stares after him before huffing, dragging his fingers down one in a blue that isn’t too far off the shade he’d picked for Wilbur’s scarf, the metal of the cart pressing uncomfortably into his back with his jacket shoved beneath him to save his arse from the same fate.

He jerks when the cart suddenly lurches forward and cranes his head up to find that Wilbur had looped the aisle around, his mouth curving warm and teasing he pushes the wheels into motion.

“Almost forgot my favourite child.”

“You say that as if there’s other children I should compete against for your favo-“ The cart lurches, a hand slapping down over his mouth as Wilbur leans down over him.

“We really need to work on your wording of things,” Wilbur says with a pained grin at a middle-aged couple staring at them both, “*little brother*,” he says louder, shifting to pat him on the top of his head.

And- he knows that Wilbur doesn’t mean it, not like *that*, but it still jerks something inside of him at the easy way it slips out of the other’s mouth, brown eyes fixed ahead, hand shifting to give him a rough ruffle of his hair that drags his fringe over his eyes once they’d shuffled on.

“You’re a menace,” Wilbur breathes out in a hush as Tommy eyes the indentation of teeth just beneath his thumb with a funny little twist in his chest. “*Please* don’t get me arrested.”

“But consider this- it would be *terribly funny*,” Tommy points out.

“Techno would murder me.”

“You think he’d let me help?”

“*Menace*,” Wilbur repeats with emphasis before consideration shifts into his gaze, mouth curving as they round a corner to a long empty corridor. “Tommy?”

“What?” he asks warily.

“Hold on tight.”

“*What-*“

The cart lurches forward and his hands shoots out, fingers curling into metal bars with a surprised shout as Wilbur’s long legs ate easy speed in the narrow corridor, feet slapping against the tiled floor, laughing as Tommy clawed a hand blindly out behind him.

“Fuck Techno, I’ll kill you dead myself!” Tommy yelps as his fingers curl into Wilbur’s yellow sweater, rows of bucket rushing past them both in a blur of colours with a rush of adrenaline that pounds the beating of his heart. “Three times over! The whole fucking dramatics, Wil- Wilbur, my man, FUCKING TURN-“

-

“I can’t *believe* you got us thrown out of the fucking *hardware store*.”

“Aww, *Tommy*, is this your first time getting ported from a store?” Wilbur shoves the last paint bucket into the trunk of his car before turning to him where he sits, curled up in the cart, jeans and shirt splattered with paint from the buckets that had burst open when they crashed.

It’s dripping onto the snowy ground beneath him and he gives the man a severely unimpressed look.

“Welcome to the club of being a dirty crime boy, sunshine.” Wilbur pokes a finger into a splotch of blue paint on his shoulder before dragging it up his cheek with a quick swipe, dodging back and out of his reach when Tommy slaps a drenched sleeve after him in a colourful arch, laughing as he glowers. “Live a little! We even got a *discount price*. I’d say that, all in all, a very successful shopping trip.”

“That’s because half of the paint is already out of the buckets,” Tommy says flatly. “And *on me*.”

Wilbur grins, hand dipping into his pocket for his phone and Tommy’s eyes widens.

“No- *no, fuck you Wilbur Soot-*“

-

Tommy and Wilbur both stares at the seat after Tommy had peeled himself off, leaving a perfect print of himself in a mash of colour on the passenger seat.

“... I’m never getting that off, am I?”

“I think it adds a bit of charm, don’t you?” Tommy grins with satisfaction as he stuffs his hands into his pockets and rocks back on his heels. “Serves you right, you dickhead.”

-

“It’s a bit unfair.”

“What is?” Tommy wonders, grumpily poking a brush of green paint against his table, leaving a large ugly blotch.

He'd been quite unceremoniously shoved out of his own fucking bedroom after hauling buckets of paint into it and the door is cracked open just enough for him to hear Wilbur's voice.

He'd taken a quick shower, scrubbing furiously to get the paint off, and he's back in one of his own hoodies, Wilbur's gray one tumbling in his washer.

“The fact that you can go all *Wilbur Soot* on me and I still have no idea what your last name is.” Wilbur steps back just enough to peer out at him through the open spring. “Where did you learn that anyway?”

Tommy cranes his head around to frown at him. “Quackity called you that. Why?”

“It's my mom's last name,” Wilbur tells him, pressing a wet brush of blue paint beneath his chin. “Legally I'm Wilbur Soot Watson because when Phil adopted me and all he let me decide whether I wanted to keep it or not *so*, I made it my middle name.”

“Oh.” Tommy blinks at him. “You're adopted as well?”

Wilbur hums, flashing him a quick smile. “Surprised?”

“Dunno. Hadn't really thought about it I guess.” Tommy drops the paint brush and shifts around, plopping down on the ground with a sprawl of his legs out before him. “Family is family, yeah? Blood don't mean shit if you're like- I mean, if you care, right?” He grimaces. “It's cool, that you all found each other and all.”

The man tilts his head, something unbearable and achingly *fond* in his eyes. “Yeah,” he agrees. “It's pretty *cool*, Toms.”

“Yeah,” he grimaces, fingers sliding down to twist in the fabric of his jeans. “I thought-“ He catches himself, ducking his head with a rough swallow. “I thought- it's stupid,” he grumbles.

“I'm sure it isn't.” There's a splotch of wet blue paint on Wilbur's chin, more colours smeared uncaringly against his pants and white shirt, and brushes of paint sticking up from his back pocket. “Nothing you could say could ever be *stupid*, I'm sure.”

“Yeah, that's a lie,” Tommy snorts, blowing a harsh breath at his fringe to get a stray curl out of his eyes. “You're so fucking *mushy*, Wilbur.”

“You make it easy to fuss,” the man laughs and Tommy gives him a flat look that makes Wilbur's mouth crease with the stretch of his smile. “You have no idea how ridiculously adorable you are, do you?”

“Piss off,” Tommy snarls, warmth crawling up his cheeks and heating the tips of his ears. “I'm not fucking *adorable*.”

“You are.” Wilbur tucks the brush into the back of his pocket among the others with a twirl that splatters blue on the side of his television. “It’s a bit unfair, really. How am I supposed to compete with those blue eyes of yours?”

Tommy gives him a long look. “Are you fishing for compliments? Because I’m not giving you any.”

“I’m giving *you* a compliment, child.” Wilbur moves to drag his fingers through his hair but seems to think better of it and lets it fall at his side, slumping against the wood of the door opening. “What was it, that you were going to say?”

“Forget it,” Tommy mutters, jerking his head aside with a clenching of his jaw. “Wasn’t important anyway.”

“Now *that* is a lie.” Wilbur threads his way towards him, crouching down with a fold of his ridiculous long legs. “*You* are important, Toms.” A hand reaches out, palm pressing warm against his cheek and angling his head to look up at the other. “And *that means*, that what you want to tell me is important too. I *want* to hear what you have to say, even if you think it’s silly or unimportant.”

“You might not like it,” Tommy cautions as a thumb strokes soft against his cheek, calloused and warm in the path it leaves.

He knows that something has shifted between them and also *not* because Wilbur is the same as always only- he seems more relaxed, more sure, his touches frequent and words teasing and warm in a way that pulls and tugs at him.

And Tommy is *selfishselfishselfish* but he thinks that, it might be okay, because Wilbur is selfish too.

“I don’t care.” The curl of Wilbur’s smile is distractingly soft. “I want to know it all, Toms.”

Tommy can’t talk about Dream and he can’t talk about Red Chaos.

But Tommy is good at finding loopholes and Wilbur promises to listen.

His phone is three numbers with unanswered messages, a single contact he’s still waiting for a response from, and it’s Wilbur whose name he’d switched out to *Bother* because he is one, in the best of ways, and Tommy is so fucking *selfish*.

“He saved me, you know?” he tells Wilbur as the man tilts his head. “I was a street kid and he took me in.” The words tumbles from his lips, tied to eight years of secrets between two lonely boys who aches for more than the world will give them. “I used to stand beside him and look into the mirror and I’d think that, *maybe we look a bit like brothers*, but I never told him.”

Wilbur tilts his head, brown eyes regarding him.

“I never told him,” Tommy admits with an ugly twist of his lips. “I wish I had because maybe- maybe it would have changed something, you know?” He twists his hand hard in his

jeans. “But I *didn't* and I don't know *why*.”

“Maybe,” the man says softly, “you were waiting for him to say it first.”

“How is that fair?” Tommy demands, shoulders curling tight under the lingering eyes of the older man. “I should have told him, Wilbur.”

“I'm guessing that things were more complicated than that.”

“It wasn't supposed to be.” Easy, uncomplicated, just the two of them together in that old shitty apartment that had been their home before Dream turned eighteen and he was given no choice in accepting his new place. “*It wasn't supposed to be*,” he repeats thickly. “I hate it.” He unclenches his hand from his jeans in favour of drawing his knees against his chest and wrapping his arms around them. “I hate *him*.”

“I don't think you do.” Wilbur shifts, settling down beside him with a bump of their shoulders together. “I think you're hurting and I think you're feeling lost and you don't know what to do, because you loved him, and you were there for him, and now he's gone and I'm *guessing*,” he says as Tommy shifts to drop his head on his shoulder, “that he never told you *why*. Am I on the right track here?”

If the rest of the world is a cloudy gray sky then Wilbur, Tommy thinks, is the *sun*.

I could burn myself on you, Wilbur Soot, Tommy thinks but does not say as he sinks deeper against the man's side, turning his head and burrowing against his sweater as an arm loops easily around his shoulders to pull him closer, a cheek angling to rub soft against his head with a low hum.

Wilbur touches him as if he could leave blue prints of himself on Tommy for the world to see, charming with the curling of his lips and the high melodic laughs that makes his breathing catch and heart feel impossible big where it sits in his chest.

“I don't know everything, but I know he's a fool, for leaving you behind.” Fingers presses up the arch of his neck to sink into his hair with a small tug. “We'll figure things out, alright, Toms?”

“What if it isn't that easy?” Tommy demands.

“Nothing in life is easy,” Wilbur breathes with a laugh, tilting his neck back and stretching out his legs as he leans back on one hand. “But I know that there are things that I wouldn't have been able to do without the people around me, without my family, without *you*.” Brown eyes settles soft on him. “I've never had a friend before, Toms, but I find that I quite like it.”

Tommy stares at him and then he averts his eyes and ducks his head down.

“I think we're done here for today.” Wilbur's palm settles on the top of his head with a rough tousle of his hair that makes him squawk, jerking away with a glower as Wilbur wiggles his fingers innocently with a stretch of his mouth. “How about you and I pick up something wonderfully unhealthy and head back home, hm?”

“What about my bedroom?” Tommy demands, scrambling to his feet as Wilbur rises smoothly from the floor, stretching his arms up above him with a crack of his spine as he ambles his way towards the door. “You still haven’t told me what the fuck you’re doing with it-!”

-

“I sincerely doubt that the words ‘please, Wilbur, can I stay here’ came out of his mouth.” Techno’s voice is heavy with disbelief where he stands at the hallway to the living room, eyes darting between them.

That’s because they sure as fuck didn’t, Tommy thinks, taking a large bite of his burger.

“It’s just for two days, Techno,” Wilbur says airily as he bites down on a fry. “It’s not like I’m kidnapping him.”

“Sure.” Techno drags a hand down his face, fingers pinching between two pink brows. “Did you ask Phil at least?”

“As if he’d say *no*,” Wilbur laughs. “Phil *likes* Tommy.”

Tommy nearly chokes on the large piece he’d just bitten off, lurching sideways to grab for his cola and sucking down obnoxiously on the straw as both brothers pauses to stare at him.

“What?” he grumbles, pressing back against Wilbur, letting the man’s warmth bleed comfortably through the fabric of his hoodie. “You’ve never seen someone choke before?”

“If you’re going to stay here you’re not allowed to die.” Techno gives him a long look. “My insurance company wouldn’t like it.”

“If I die I’ll do my very best to tip out the nearest window first,” Tommy promises with a flash of teeth. “Plausible deniability and all that.”

“Don’t do that, you’d attract the *neighbors*.”

Tommy considers that. “Fair,” he says with a shrug, taking another bite after pinching the cup of soda between his thighs to keep it within reach.

“I picked some up for you too, Techno.” Wilbur motions towards the other two bags waiting on the table. “Mushroom burger- we did a whole detour for it,” he pursues with a wiggle of his brows and Techno sighs but resigns himself to his fate, throwing the jacket of his suit aside and turning to sink down in the nearest armchair.

“We drove twenty minutes for a fucking *mushroom burger*?” Tommy asks disbelievingly.

“It’s good.” Techno fishes up the wrapped burger, flipping the wrap half-way off and taking a bite, leaning back with a sigh. “You should give it a try.”

Tommy side-eyes him. “I don’t believe you,” he decides but there’s a niggling sort of curiosity all the same. “What the fuck even *is* a mushroom burger?”

“They just switch out the meat for a portabella mushroom,” Wilbur says after swallowing down a mouthful of fries. “It’s pretty good, if you like said mushrooms, which *I do not*.”

“It’s because you don’t have *taste*, Wil.”

“Techno, I watched you microwave a potato just last night, you don’t get to talk to me about *taste*.”

“I’ve never had them,” Tommy grunts as he crams the last of his burger into his mouth, chewing with bulging cheeks.

“What, mushrooms?” Wilbur cranes his head to blink down at him. “Why the fuck not?”

Tommy shrugs, hunching forward just enough to reach the straw of his cola as he made grabby hands for a napkin which Wilbur passes with a soft noise that sounds suspiciously like an *aww*.

“Dunno, just never did.” He wipes his hands clean and spares a moment to scrub it roughly over his lips *just in case* before balling it up and lobbing it into his open paper bag along with the burger wrap a second later.

Sapnap was the only one out of them who could cook and it was very likely the man just didn’t *like* mushrooms because Tommy had never seen them anywhere near his plate or in any of the lunch boxes Dream had brought around to his apartment.

Dream made basic ass food and the most adventurous Tommy had seen him was the cheese stuffed turkey Sapnap had lobbed clean out the window George had cracked open on his fifteenth Christmas evening.

They had ended up ordering pizza while Dream mourned the strange neon orange leaking monstrosity.

George was banned from the kitchen for a fucking *reason* because where Dream tended to undercook and not season *shit* George habitually burnt anything that didn’t have his full focus and more often than not that was not on the food but on Dream, or Sapnap, or his phone or computer or zoning out in a half-nap with the dredging pulls of his powers.

Sapnap actually *enjoyed* cooking, something about the delicate handling of *flames* and perfect temperatures and fucking *whatever*.

Tommy kinda regrets not learning from him but- his relationship with Sapnap was a pull and shove kind of thing and for all that he liked Sapnap the man had a way of worming under his skin.

The garage had been *their* spot, an unspoken treaty, but the kitchen had always been a place of argument, raised voices and frustration blossoming quick, teasing spilling into too sharp jabs and lines crossed faster than he could catch them at it.

It had been especially bad during his last year in the tower, an undercurrent of tightly wired tension just waiting to be set off that had made him keep a wary step away from it.

So, he'd never learned, and now he's living on toast, fried rice and cups of noodles which, *fucking fantastic*, really.

He blinks, peering warily at the hand stretched towards him, a burger wrapped in a golden bun without sesame seeds, wrapper thin and crinkling around it. There's a green leaf sticking to the side of it, some sort of sauce that looks like it has corns of pepper in it, and a flat large mushroom hat instead of a beef patty.

"You can break a piece off," Techno says with an unreadable look as Tommy slowly grabs it. "Or just take a bite, I don't care."

"Not a germophobe?" Tommy wonders, turning it curiously.

"You don't *look* like you have rabies," the man says wryly. "If you do, I'll just blame Wilbur."

"Hey now, why are you involving *me* in this?" Wilbur splutters. "I'm just eating my nuggets, leave me alone."

"Your kid, your responsibility," Techno says with a sharp curl of his lips.

Tommy hesitates but- his teeth sinks into it before he can second guess himself and there's a burst of flavours, a strange sort of satisfying texture he doesn't recognize with a burst of peppery flavour accompanying it from the dressing, and he's biting down a second time, intent on getting as large of a bite as possible before it's abruptly yanked from his hands.

Techno stares at the half-eaten mushroom burger and then slowly looks to Tommy who is struggling to chew, hands pressing against his mouth as he works his jaw around it, satisfaction thick inside of him as he meets the man's disbelieving eyes.

"... I take it back, he's got rabies for sure."

"Techno--"

"He's not a *child*, he's a goddamn *raccoon*. *Who does that!?*"

Chapter End Notes

Bruh, I'm never touching Sapnap's POV ever again in my life. My brain just does not work well with him and I'd preferred doing like, Quackity, for it, but, it wouldn't have worked. So. I'm officially done overthinking it and just gonna throw it at you guys.

(I mean, I will, if I have to, but it's the sentiment and suffering.)

Take the extra long chapter as a bonus - it's practically a Tommy chapter plus Sapnap's POV on top of it with all the numbers taken into consideration. So. Have fun with that?

Friday night good vibes yes??

Chapter 9 was intense and it's a bit of a careful swinging to get the tone just right after such a conversation but I finally wrestled it down into what I wanted. I can't tell you how much it helped to get a good overview of your thoughts and reactions to it - it's been a delight to take part of<3

Time to flop down and read some fics, yeah? I hope you all having a wonderful day/night :)

-

We. Have so much fanart. Dudes. I blinked between one chapter and the next and I was kinda blown away and it's 2 am and I *think* I got them all added up below? I'll double check in the morning but if not I'll fix it, yeah? And - I reblog everything on my tumblr [corpse-art](#) so feel free to swing by there :)

Thank you all so so much. It's absolutely fucking amazing to see it and it makes me very, very happy.

(If I link your art and you want, for whatever reason, for me to remove or change anything just let me know, yeah?)

On that note - ART:

[An encounter with the angel of death for chapter 2 by owlwinter8](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[Tommy doesn't look like a civilian by owlwinter8 for chapter 9](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[You look like a Tommy to me by hiblue for chapter 9](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[Red Chaos concept art by void-ant](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[Tommy in Dream vs Wilbur hoodie by Eu_nyx for chapter 9](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[Cooking with the angel of death for chapter 2 by scytheart](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[I make threats not promises Tommyinnit by 100-reasons-sbi](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[Tommy and the Blood God by jellyswissroll for chapter 1](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[Are we friends Wilbur by owlwinter8 for chapter 3](#)

[Learning to cook by owlwinter8 for chapter 2](#)

[You Got Me a Christmas Present by lilacadaisy for chapter 3](#)

[THIS IS OUR POGTOPIA by hiblue for chapter 4](#)

[Red Chaos by fridges](#)

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Phil arrives when Tommy is half-asleep and drowsily fiddling with a strange rubbery cube Techno had thrown him for whatever reason.

It's colourful- green, orange and blue stretching together over the core yellow colour of it, hard but still mouldable, knotted together in a way that means he can wiggle his fingers beneath them and tug with a twist before letting it relax, repeating it as he turns it.

He'd been tempted to sink his teeth into it, just to see what the weird texture would feel like.

"Tommy is here," Techno calls without looking up, ear twitching as the door closed shut.

He's absolutely gonna steal it away, unless Techno explicitly asks for it back, and he side-eyes the man who had relaxed back, one leg thrown up to rest with the ankle on the knee, an old looking book with leather spine open in one hand.

"Hello to you too, mate," Phil's voice is amused as he steps into the living room, blue eyes finding Tommy easily, head tilting. "You staying the night, Tommy?"

"He is," Wilbur answers as Tommy twists the toy around, slouching further against him. "Two nights," he adds as Phil studies the motion of Tommy's fingers. "We're doing some apartment fixing so his bedroom is currently inhabitable."

"Is that why you sent me a picture of you covered in blue, mate?" Phil wonders as Wilbur, who had one foot thrown up on the table, angles it meaningfully towards the lone bag of untouched fast food that remained after Techno had swept away the rest of the trash. "And-"

"Don't tell him!" Hands slaps down so fast over his ears that Tommy jerks in surprise, angling back to scowl at the man who is shaking his head to whatever is being said, mouth twisting with a complicated thing briefly, face tilting with a shrug before they slide off with a ruffle of his hair.

"Thanks," Tommy says dryly.

"You're welcome, gremlin." Wilbur laughs, twisting to half-slouch down against him, one arm looping around him, and Tommy's chest expands and then lowers, relaxing into the solid hold on him as the other presses his chin down on top of his head.

"You two look cosy," Phil comments with a strange tone and Tommy flicks his gaze up, mouth curling as blue eyes meets his. "Had a good day?"

"I think we had a pretty good one," Wilbur muses and Tommy doesn't have to look up to see the curl of his smile and it feels like a shared secret as the other's weight settles more firmly against him, Wilbur practically draped over him now. "What do you think, Toms?"

“It was alright,” he snorts, slouching back into the hold.

Phil hums, eyes flickering between them before shifting to Techno who is staring at Wilbur with a twist of his lips, book closing shut with a snap.

“Alright, *we* are going to have a talk.” Techno rises abruptly and Tommy narrows his eyes, muscles coiling tense with a baring of his teeth. “*You* can stop looking at me like that,” the man says flatly, eyes settling sharply on him. “You two have been weird all evening.”

“Leave it alone, Techno,” Wilbur’s voice dips dangerously.

“No, I don’t think I will,” Techno takes a step forward and Wilbur’s arms wraps solidly around him as the man practically folds around him, Tommy tensing because fucking hell he’d rather *not just fucking sit here if there’s going to be an argument*. “Wil-“

“No,” Wilbur says simply and Tommy flicks his eyes to Phil who is standing in the frame to the living room, watching the unfolding scene with a thinning of his lips. “I’m not doing this, Tech. Tommy and I already talked. We’re on the same page here and he doesn’t mind it.” Tommy’s fingers twitches, trying to twist his head to get a look at his friend’s face, but Wilbur’s arms tightens. “He doesn’t mind *me*.”

And- there’s something wounded there that makes him prickly, the muscles in his shoulders coiling tight with a clenching of his jaw.

“Leave him *alone*.” Tommy fluffs up protectively, as best as he can, wrapped in arms that he’s coming to realise is less about trapping him, and more like he’s being clung to, and it makes him want to shove Wilbur’s ridiculously tall figure firmly behind him. “You’re all so fucking-“

“Toms-“

“*No!*” Tommy snaps. “Stop- fucking doing that!” He shoves an elbow back, twisting in his grip until Wilbur has no choice but to relent his grip on him so he can glare up with a stubborn set of his jaw. “You’re *my friend*, Wilbur, and I’m so damn tired of people butting in where they don’t fucking belong!”

Startled brown eyes stares back at him and Tommy has a brief moment of self-satisfaction before he rounds to point at Techno.

“I don’t *care*,” he bites out, “about whatever the fuck you want to say, alright? You- all of you people can just fuck right off and let us deal with shit on our own or, I don’t fucking know, *talk with both of us*. Because I’m not playing some fucking whiplash game of this asshole questioning himself because of something you’ve said behind my back when it directly impacts me, alright? I’ve done that- I’ve been there with people doing it- and I don’t fucking like it *one bit*.”

Because Tommy choses to stay with Dream willingly, he *does*, and it’s fucking *messy*, and he knows it is, they both do, but they figure shit out because they have to, because they want to, because they’re working towards more than just ideals like *wanting to be the top Hero*.

He *knows* it's a crash and burn situation if people were to figure things out but, *shit*, he's his own fucking *person*.

He makes his choices and Wilbur-

Wilbur is a grown fucking adult who can make *his*.

Tommy doesn't know where he stands with Dream anymore and he blames himself and he blames Dream and he's frustrated and angry and so fucking *lost*.

And Tommy can't do this again. Can't sit and watch as Techno interferes when Wilbur's all he's got, when they're figuring shit out, not when he genuinely fucking *likes* the man behind him, when he's already stepping out of his comfort zone and letting Wilbur push at his boundaries because he's proven that he can be, *maybe*, trusted to do that.

Techno's gaze burns into his and Tommy's fingers curls, the toy forgotten and discarded aside on the couch as he draws one breath after the other, heart pounding in his chest, Wilbur's an echoed thing in the press of his chest against his back.

"We don't need to be monitored like we're some misbehaving children," Tommy bites out. "I'm *sixteen*, I'm well fucking old enough to decide if I want to drag this bitch around with me."

Wilbur makes a low noise behind him and it takes his brain a solid second to realize he's fucking *laughing*.

"Shut up," he hisses, flushing as he rounds on Wilbur who has a hand pressing against his mouth, body shaking. "You're not being helpful in the least right now you idiot," Tommy growls, shoving a shoulder into his chest. "For *fuck's sake*-"

"He's got a point, Techno," Phil's voice is clear, stepping into the room and sinking down on the arm of the chair beside him, ankles crossing. "They've clearly made their decision."

"Yeah," Tommy agrees, rounding towards him. "What *he* said!"

Phil's eyes gleams and for all that Wilbur had said he was adopted there's a clear likeness between them in the curl of his smile.

"So why don't you say what you had to say to them both," Phil continues with an easy sort of relaxed shift, eyes never veering from Tommy's. "A bit of a heart to heart, if you will."

"I know you worry, Techno," Wilbur's voice softens, gentle as his brother looks to him. "But I want to give this a try and so does he."

Tommy feels like he's missing something, but he doesn't know what it *is*, and he watches Techno and Wilbur stare each other down, his gaze flickering towards Phil who gives him a small smile that makes his neck prickle uncomfortably.

"Tommy." He jerks, gaze darting up as Techno folds his arms across his chest. "I don't like that I don't know anything about you."

His brow knits. "You said as much," he huffs. "But it's not like I know shit about you *either*, asshole."

Techno gives him a long look and Tommy stares back with a curling of his lips.

"Tommy is staying here for the next two days so why don't you take the time to get to know him then?" Wilbur grins as Tommy jerks to stare at him in shock. "He doesn't have work, I already asked Sam. You can have the whole day tomorrow."

"I'm not spending my time with *him*!"

But- to Tommy's blossoming horror, there's no instant agreement with him from Wilbur's brother.

Instead there's consideration, a low hum and arms folding across his chest.

"Babysitting duty."

"Oh *fuck you*," Tommy bristles.

-

Tommy kicks his leg out, tensing his muscles to catch a dull low *thunk* of his heel against the wood of the house where he sits, window pried open, snow half-heartedly dusted off to save the sweatpants Wilbur had borrowed him from getting wet from the melting snow.

He slouches out, resting his elbows on his knees, staring out over the yard.

Below him there's a lamp casting a dull warm light where the back door is located, a step to the left below him. It opens into a large space that's been bunched in by a strange mixture of trees and bushes.

A large willow tree dangles ropy branches down over a small frozen pond, and he thinks that one of the larger trees on the left might be a dogwood tree. But it's been a long time since he read that book on trees Dream had scurried home a strange week in August.

He wonders how it is that just a few years can feel like a lifetime ago.

Tommy misses the simpler times, when Dream's smile had been more frequent, his strange wheezing laughter loud and startled when Tommy had managed to catch him off-guard with something he'd said.

He doesn't regret becoming a Hero. He knows he belongs at Dream's side, it's been his one truth for *years*, ever since a boy in an oversized green hoodie decided to give him a chance.

It's an idea that had only settled more steady and sure inside of him when he actually stepped into the Hero scene.

"*I want to make this world a better place*," Dream tells him and Tommy desperately wants to believe it's possible.

Dream is idealistic in ways Tommy has never been.

He doesn't understand it, but he wants to.

He clings to the idea of the world Dream paints for him, even when he's wading in the ugly gritty parts of society, witnessing violence and cruelty that the news paints over with the bright smiles of their Heroes.

It's in a girl, a gangly lanky thing in ill-fitted suit, arm curled tight around her girlfriend who moves and moves, her eyes large and vacant, mouth parted to reveal teeth stained grey from the black ooze spilling in rasped breaths down her lips, dripping from her nose and bleeding thick over the crusted red of her dress from a deceptively small hole in her chest.

She's is crying and dancing, the one responsible for the shooting dead, her powers wrapping around her to force her into one last morbid dance.

She gets locked up in Pandora's Vault, inside obsidian walls that drains the powers and energy of those housed inside it until they're stumbling husks of humans, deemed *too dangerous to get released back into society*, and left to rot because of it.

It's in the tears dripping down the face of an elderly woman who clings to her dead husband with broken legs from their tumble out a window, a desperate attempt to save him from the chaos of a fight between a Hero and Villain that had cracked his head open like an egg against the sidewalk, blood pooling despite her frail trembling hand pressing desperately against brain and bone.

She signs an NDA disclosure for a sum of money in the aftermath that pays for the hospital bills, a pretty grave, and her silence in the midst of grief because the only other choice is to be left destitute and homeless.

Tommy reads the headlines in the aftermath of their missions, sees how much gets cut out, pictures taken and reassurance in large bold letters that fail to address the root of the problems, and he stands firm at the side of his mentor who challenges it and his fellow Heroes to be *better*.

He glances down at his hoodie, navy blue with a polar bear deep asleep on its back with a seal curled up on its belly, and the emptiness feels yawning and deep inside of him as he looks back out over the yard.

He wonders if Wilbur had grown-up here, away from the city, the nearest neighbour house just visible between stray trees that rise high, porch lights on like a speck in the dark.

Tries to picture a tiny Wilbur tumbling in the snow and-

Tommy straightens up, scrubbing a rough hand against his neck with a grimace, tilting further back to peer over his shoulders as he hears the soft sound of a door opening, quiet bare feet padding down the corridor and disappearing down the stairs.

He blinks, brow furrowing, flexing his toes a bit absently against the bite of the cold.

There's a creak, the sound of a shoulder muffled against wood, a door opening up beneath him, and he tilts his head, peering down as Wilbur steps out into the snow on bare feet, hair messy, dressed in dark sleeping pants and a thin long-sleeved shirt that's half-rolled up his arms.

The scarf Tommy had made him is wrapped loosely around his neck.

Wilbur paws at his pocket, one hand rubbing over his jaw as he drags out a package of cigarette, the motion stilling as he stares down at it.

There's a moment and then he digs his fingers down to pull one out, sliding it between his lips as the other hand dips for the other pocket of his pants.

"Those things are gonna kill you, you know."

The man jerks, head turning sharply up towards him with pinpoint accuracy, and Tommy slouches forward to see him better in the back porch light.

"I guess I should be happy you're at least in the bedroom this time," Wilbur comments, rolling the cigarette to the side of his mouth as he finally pulls up the lighter and cups his palms over the tip of it, the cheap lighter taking three tries before it catches and lightens it. "You have atrocious sleeping habits, child."

Wilbur draws a breath, smoke curling down his lungs, head tipping back and eyes fluttering close.

"Maybe you just have a shitty guest room," Tommy points out smartly as he props his elbows on his knees. "Mattress is like, weirdly soft."

Wilbur releases the smoke in a slow stream that ghosts white against the darkness, the corner of his mouth curling up.

"I'll make sure to inform Phil his mattress choices aren't up to your standard."

"It's not like it matters," Tommy huffs. "I'm just staying here for two nights anyway."

"But what if I want you to stay here again? After this."

"... I'll sleep on the fucking floor or something." Tommy desperately tries to ignore the flare of warmth that blossoms in his chest, soft like petals and hot like the sun where it spreads beneath his ribs in an aching contrast of the cold night. "Hey, Wilbur?"

A hum, high in note.

"Why-" Tommy's jaw clenches. "Why did you suggest I'll spend the day with Techno tomorrow?" he forces out as Wilbur draws another lungful of smoke, head tilted to watch him. "I thought we were fixing up my apartment."

"The easy thing to say is that I want you to get along with my family," Wilbur answers after a beat, hand lowering at his side, the cigarette glowing with dull embers. "Selfishly so,

perhaps.”

Tommy’s mouth curls and he turns his head to stare at the spindly branches of the willow tree.

“As much as I want to keep you for myself,” Wilbur’s voice reaches him, low and warm, “it would be better if you have more people than just me.” Tommy’s hand curls into his pants. “But I’m not about to trust you with just anyone.”

Tommy mulls over the words, brow furrowed as his thumb flicks back and forth in a folded crease.

“Techno won’t hurt you,” Wilbur tells him and Tommy isn’t so sure that the man would echo the sentiment. “He’s a softie, beneath the surface, and once you have his loyalty-“ There’s a pause, a breath drawn and let out. “Techno values loyalty.” There’s an odd note to his voice but when Tommy looks down at him Wilbur is gazing out over the yard, leaving him to stare at the unruly mess of his hair. “He doesn’t know what to make of you, as it is now, but I’d like him to at least be able to relax a bit and I think- I *know* that if he just gets to know you a bit better-“

Wilbur pauses, and when he speaks again his voice is softer.

“Techno’s my brother. I trust him with my life and I trust him with yours.” There’s weight to the words hangs in the air between them. “I know this entire situation stresses him out, and I don’t want it to, because I love him. You’re both two of my favourite people and I want you to get along.” Wilbur flicks his thumb, ash fluttering to the ground as Tommy drinks the sight of him. “He’s not much for social situations but he’s curious about you, which is why he agreed.” A low laugh, strangely hollow in the night air. “I actually expected more of a protest from him.”

Tommy huffs, kicking his leg out, letting his heel thunk hard against the wood as Wilbur draws another lungful of smoke.

“I want to show you off to my people, Toms,” Wilbur breaths out with a ghostly mist of white smoke. “I want to show you off to the *world*. But I also want to hide you away, selfishly so.” His head tilts back, eyes glittering warmly up at him. “Give him a chance. You’re both more alike than you think.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Tommy demands as Wilbur draws one last lungful of smoke before snuffing the butt of the cigarette out on and crouching down to stuff it down an upside-down ceramic pot.

“Find out for yourself,” Wilbur laughs, smoke curling out his mouth as he rocks back on his heels. “Don’t worry, I’ll make sure he has something fun planned for you tomorrow.”

Tommy gives him a wary look. “Because that’s not ominous as fuck.”

“Trust me,” the man grins at him. “You don’t want to know what Techno considers an *ice breaker*. I don’t think Ranboo’s quite recovered from their first outing.” A beat. “I know I

haven't."

"What's with him and *Ranboob* anyway?" Tommy asks before he can catch himself. "He said Techno helped him out or some shit."

"It's not really my story to tell." Wilbur shifts one bare foot to wipe it away against the ankle of his sweatpants. "You might see him, he stops by every now and then."

"No thank you," Tommy scowls. "I'm happy if I never have to see that fucker again."

"You never did tell me what happened between the two of you." Wilbur drags a hand through his hair, mussing it up roughly as his mouth tips up endearingly. "Picking fights when I'm not watching?"

"Piss off."

Wilbur hums, eyes glittering with amusement.

"Will you actually sleep if I leave you up there, gremlin?" Wilbur stretches his arms up above his head, shirt riding up to a small shiver before he abruptly drops them down again. "Or will I find you on the bathroom floor again?"

"Maybe it's better than the weirdly soft bed," Tommy grumps, slouching side-ways against the window frame and closing his eyes against the cold breeze.

-

It's like learning how to breathe again, the moments he spends with Wilbur.

Like learning the steps to an old and new song because Wilbur's not Dream and he never will be.

There's comparisons to be drawn between them, and there's enough differences to be startling, in the way Wilbur looks at him, anticipates him, knowing, soft and intense at the same time, blunt with his affections where Dream had been cautious and withdrawn.

Dream had allowed Tommy's closeness, had offered a shoulder, had even held him, on rare occasions, and he knows that it's something that comes hard for his mentor and treasures because of it.

Wilbur is sprawled on his stomach, head turned and cheek mashed against the fold of his arm, pillow shoved away to where the mess of his hair just brushes against it. His covers are far down on his back, a foot poking out, and Tommy reaches out with his own to nudge the fabric out over it before yanking it back under his own.

He swallows, hand tightening around his phone as he draws it up, powering the screen on to stare at the message on the screen.

It's an open invitation for a meeting, in Las Nevadas, with one of Royal's contacts, three days from now.

Las Nevadas is its own country in the midst of L'Manberg, the land owned and ruled by Jester who had made it a neutral ground. Hero, Villain, Vigilante – it didn't matter, once you entered the ground of Las Nevadas you were playing the game on Jester's rules and Jester's rules only.

Tommy's never been there, Dream had deemed it too much of a risk, but-

He has no idea who this contact is. Royal hadn't exactly been forthcoming with information, it was too risky over text anyway, Tommy knows that, but *fuck*.

He has a choice to make. It makes his heart pound because this might be *it*, his first step towards seeing Dream again after months of *nothing*.

It's not a question of if he's going or not. Tommy has to take this chance.

He doesn't think he can live with himself if he doesn't.

There's soft blue light from the aquarium in the corner waving over the ceiling in the soft ripples from the strangely large fish that's housed inside of it, streaked with silver and a line of pale pink down its scales.

He tips his head towards it, looking at the large empty black eyes that stares right back at him, judging him.

"Go to sleep." A hand paws blindly out to grasp at his wrist, yanking him closer to a startled noise as the man's limbs wasted no time in folding around him, arm wrapping over his chest and a leg looping over his knees to trap him close with a warm exhale against his neck as Wilbur slumped against his back with Tommy half-tucked beneath him. "I can hear you overthinking something."

"Am not," Tommy mutters distractedly, hyperaware of the way Wilbur's chest rises and falls against his back, the weight settling like a soothing buffering buzz against his thoughts as he hides his phone beneath his stomach.

"You are," Wilbur huffs, tightening his hold. "Want to talk about it?"

Tommy's mouth twists and he doesn't answer.

"If it's about tomorrow," Wilbur breathes with a soft sigh that ruffles his hair, "I can still call it off, if it really bothers you."

"s not about that," Tommy admits grudgingly. "Just... Wilbur?"

"Hm?"

"... Do you ever feel like what you're doing isn't enough?"

"Sometimes," the man says, voice quiet, like a secret, "it's hard to just breathe because I feel like I'm folding under the weight of it all." A rough exhale. "I have people who rely on me, and I wonder if I'm doing enough, if I'm measuring up." There's a moment of silence, the

only sound their breathing in the quiet room. “It’s strange, how lonely you can feel in a room full of people, isn’t it?”

“Yeah,” Tommy breathes, the feeling of kinship blossoming warm and twisted with guilt threading thick through it. “Yeah it is.”

“This might sound whiny or dumb.” Wilbur burrows his face against his neck. “But for years, all I’ve wanted was someone to just talk to. To be myself with. To have someone like *you*.” He can feel the curve of his smile against his neck. “It made me happy, when you defended me today.”

“Clingy,” Tommy mutters and it startles a breath of laughter from the other.

“Go to sleep gremlin.” Wilbur drops more of his weight against him. “You can solve the mysteries of the world tomorrow.”

Tommy grumbles, squirming into a more comfortable position before going lax with a huff.

He falls asleep to the sound of Wilbur’s soft breathing, hand still wrapped tight around his phone.

-

“I don’t think I could do it,” George mutters through his earpiece as Tommy twists through the tight ventilation shaft, bracing himself carefully against the sides as he goes downwards into the darkness.

“Do what?” Tommy mutters back, turning awkwardly to get through the side-ventilation, wrinkling his nose and pressing his tongue against the roof of his mouth to prevent a sneeze as dust filled his nostrils.

There’s a pausing of the tapping of keys, distant and barely caught despite his hearing prickling sharp for any sound.

“Don’t you think Dream’s been acting a bit odd lately?” George asks suddenly, instead of answering, his accent thick around the wrap of the words, something tense in the bite of them. *“You live with him, you must have noticed something.”*

There’s a small spider in a web in the corner that he cautiously twists by, muttering a low apology when its front legs lifted cautiously as he brushed against thin long strings despite doing his best to avoid them.

“He’s just stressed,” Tommy says defensively. *“He’s got the whole fucking world demanding things from him.”*

“It’s not that.” George’s voice lowers, cautiousness in his tone. *“Tommy-”*

And it’s not like he doesn’t *know*. He’s well-aware of how high-strung Dream has been, obsessing about the slightest mistake, tearing himself apart inside the walls of his apartment and researching long into the hours of the night with mutters Tommy can make little sense of.

He's been disappearing more and more too, pulled into meetings with the Hero commission that left his temper short and frayed, but it's not like it's something *new*.

Dream's dealt with them before, has dealt with public backlash and heavy pressure put on him only to rise above it.

"I'll talk to him," he bites out with a rough exhale. *"Just- focus on the mission, alright? Leave Dream to me."*

"He's always in over his head," George complains, the tapping aggressive through his earpiece. *"Take a left here."*

"I thought I was going right?"

"Change of plans."

"You're gonna get me in trouble," Tommy snorts but he takes a left. *"Have you seen Bad lately?"*

"No." There's a grumble, a knocking of a knee against the desk and a low curse as a bottle of water was hurriedly caught and straightened up. *"I believe Sapnap spoke to him a week or so ago?"*

Tommy makes a noncommittal noise.

"If there's someone who has been acting weird it's fucking Sapnap," he grumbles. *"He's barely in the tower these days."*

"For a good reason," George's voice twists strange. *"It's a miracle Schlatt didn't kill him."*

There's a moment of silence between them, George tap-tap-taping away, Tommy doing his level best to become one with the ventilation shaft as the first muted sound of voices passed beneath him.

"You ever feel left out of the loop, Gogy?"

"Every day," the older man complains and Tommy breathes a short laugh inside the tightly crammed walls. *"Dream is in position- he's just waiting on you."*

He's sixteen.

The world isn't so complicated, even when it is.

"Tell him three minutes."

There's a low noise of confirmation, line dipping into silence, and Tommy draws a breath, curling awkwardly as he paws a hand down for his pouch, pulling out a small capsule between his index and middle finger.

He presses his thumb against the invisible button on his mask and it ripples, sliding open with a metallic *schlick*.

“Alright, you’re gonna have to go up the stairs immediately to your left and then go up,” George’s voice crackles through his earpiece. *“Dream will come from above– you’ll effectively have the target trapped if you can pull this off.”*

“Got it.” Tommy pops the capsule into his mouth, biting down sharply with a spreading grin behind his mask as it sealed back shut.

“It’s show time, baby.”

Chapter End Notes

Yooooo, welcome back to another chapter of Hush Now :)

This chapter got a lot more conversation heavy than I first anticipated and before I knew it I was twelve pages deep into it. But, this is a very relationship heavy story so, ayo, vibing with it.

If you're hanging about on my tumblr you might have caught the fact that I was away working for a week which is why this update is a bit on the later scale. But it's here, we're here, and I've been struggling to resist the urge to start on chapter 12 already.

Ngl, excited for it.

It's Saturday and I'm about to have a drink in the sun and stretch out like a lazy cat. Hope all of you are having a good one!! Thank you for the absolutely amazing love and support, it's enough to make me want to melt away from happiness.

-

We. Have so much fanart. Dudes. I blinked between one chapter and the next and I was kinda blown away and it's 2 am and I *think* I got them all added up below? I'll double check in the morning but if not I'll fix it, yeah? And - I reblog everything on my tumblr [corpse-art](#) so feel free to swing by there :)

Thank you all so so much. It's absolutely fucking amazing to see it and it makes me very, very happy.

(If I link your art and you want, for whatever reason, for me to remove or change anything just let me know, yeah?)

On that note - ART:

[Photo Taken Seconds Before Disaster by owlwinter8 for chapter 10](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[An encounter with the angel of death for chapter 2 by owlwinter8](#)

[Tommy doesn't look like a civilian by owlwinter8 for chapter 9](#)

[You look like a Tommy to me by hiblue for chapter 9](#)

[Red Chaos concept art by void-ant](#)

[Tommy in Dream vs Wilbur hoodie by Eu_nyx for chapter 9](#)

[Cooking with the angel of death for chapter 2 by scytheart](#)

[I make threats not promises Tommyinnit by 100-reasons-sbi](#)

[Tommy and the Blood God by jellyswissroll for chapter 1](#)

[Are we friends Wilbur by owlwinter8 for chapter 3](#)

[Learning to cook by owlwinter8 for chapter 2](#)

[You Got Me a Christmas Present by lilacadaisy for chapter 3](#)

[THIS IS OUR POGTOPIA by hiblue for chapter 4](#)

[Red Chaos by fridges](#)

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy wakes to a hand grabbing and yanking his hoodie roughly backwards, away from the tight fold of arms wired around him with and into the cold assault of the air as his eyes snapped open, already twisting to draw his weight downwards, foot lashing out-

A hand seals tight around his ankle, stopping it an inch away from breaking a nose, yanking him closer with a slide against the mattress and his brain computes the assaulter with a shocked buzz that freezes him in place as he's hauled up like a sack of potatoes to land roughly over a sharp shoulder that digs into his belly.

"We don't hurt civilians," Dream's voice rings sharp at the back of his mind, stilling his limbs as adrenaline burns through him with a twitch of muscles and a shiver.

"What the *fuck*-" Tommy croaks.

"Techno?" Wilbur's voice asks groggily from behind him. *"What-"*

"You said I could have him for the day," Techno drawls with a shift of his feet and Tommy's fingers curls instinctively into the back of his shirt, eyes wide like a startled cat where he clings.

"It's five am."

"Which means we're already wasting time."

And with that Tommy's spun around, only just catching Wilbur's wide eyes before Techno made a sharp turn, trotting easily down the hallway, away from Wilbur who he can hear scramble up with a curse and a slap of bare feet against the floor.

Techno's strides lengthens and Tommy desperately struggles to work sense back into the world as he's rocked with the motion of his walking, that strange eerie warmth of the other bleeding through his hoodie, a muted flowery scent filling his lungs with the brush of pink hair against the side of his face.

"Techno-" Wilbur careens around the corner with a slide, disheveled and nearly tripping over his feet as he lurched forward, a hand sealing tight around the railing to catch himself. "You can't just-"

"I can," Techno says, calm and unruffled as he makes the last step, "and I *will*."

Tommy watches as something dark and wild flares through Wilbur's eyes, his mouth twisting and knuckles bunching white against wood with tension that settles sharp in his shoulders, ribs expanding with a rough inhale.

“Technoblade!” Wilbur’s voice rings out sharp and dangerous, and Techno halts, slowly angling his head to look over his shoulder. “Just- fucking wait a moment.” Wilbur’s hand rakes harshly through his hair as Tommy’s foot finds an anchor in Techno’s belt, the man’s arm tightening around his thighs in warning. *“What- can you just-“* his voice falters, mouth thinning into a thin pale line.

“Wil, it’s *fine*,” Techno sighs as Tommy twists to claw a hand further up his shirt. “I’ll get him back in one piece.”

Wilbur doesn’t look very reassured, something naked and bare in the vulnerability that settles in his eyes as he breathes in, swallowing thickly, gaze darting to Tommy who stares back, frozen and unsure what to do or say.

“Techno’s my brother. I trust him with my life and I trust him with yours.” Wilbur’s words rings through his head, the weight of it wiring like lead around his heart as his fingers curls tighter into the soft white sweater of the man holding onto him. *“Give him a chance. You’re both more alike than you think.”*

Tommy hadn’t liked George or Sapnap when they were first introduced into his life courtesy of Dream. He’d been resentful, sharp and biting and so very fucking *afraid* that they were going to take him away from him.

“Look, get your head out of your ass kid,” Sapnap had snapped at him. *“Dream can have friends, that doesn’t change whatever the goddamn hell you two are, alright? So get over yourself.”*

Wilbur loves his family.

“For years, all I’ve wanted was someone to just talk to. To be myself with. To have someone like you.”

Tommy is going back to Dream.

“It’s fine,” Tommy manages to squeeze out, angling for a smile that twists strange on his face with the pounding of his heart. “There’s a plant on my kitchen table,” he blurts out as Wilbur’s eyes darts desperately over his face. “Her name- her name is *Clementine* and she needs to be watered.”

Wilbur’s tight grip on the railing slowly eases.

“You named your plant *Clementine*?” There’s an unsteady attempt at teasing in the wiring of Wilbur’s tone and Tommy latches desperately onto it, like a dog to a bone, because he wants nothing more than to erase that look on Wilbur’s face.

“You have a fucking problem with it?” Tommy presses his toes against Techno’s belt and pushes up just enough to brace his forearm against the man’s back. “Clementine is a very poggers name.”

Wilbur's mouth slowly curls into the beginning of a smile. "Very poggers," he echoes. "I'll-yeah, I'll take care of her, don't you worry, Toms."

"You better," Tommy breathes as Techno's grip on him cautiously loosens. "She deserves only the best."

Wilbur hums, straightening up, a tall gangly shadow in the dull cast of the lamp behind him.

And there's something strange about the way his shoulders settles, almost disjointed, fingers twitching at his side before one hand slides into the pocket of his sweatpants and he tips to rest against the wall.

"There's coffee on the kitchen table," Techno rustles Tommy up into a more comfortable position. "I'll have him home at eight at the latest."

"Have fun," Wilbur says, tone distant as one hand raises in a wave, brown eyes lingering on Tommy until he disappears out of sight, front door opening up with a blast of cold and then kicked shut behind them both.

"That was a fucking disaster," Tommy breathes roughly as Techno's boots crunches in the snow. "What was that about?"

"You need to understand what you're dealing with here," Techno grunts as he rounds his red SUV, door already open and waiting as he unceremoniously dumps Tommy into the passenger seat. "Belt," he says with a sharp look.

Tommy narrows his eyes at him, keeping eye contact as he slowly dragged the belt over his chest and slid it into place with a *click*.

Techno slams the door in his face.

"Your jacket is in the trunk."

Tommy jerks, craning around to stare at Phil seated in the middle-seat behind him, strapped in place with an infuriating sort of calm nonchalance, a large ceramic cup with #1 DAD clutched between his palms.

"I believe," he says musingly with a curving smile that makes Tommy's neck prickle, "your shoes might be somewhere back there as well."

Techno opens his door and slides into the driver seat, letting out a noisy sigh as one hand rubbed against the side of his face with a grimace.

"You really handled that one well, asshole," Tommy bites out. "I'm not going *anywhere* if you didn't bring my fucking socks."

Techno's look is tired and judging.

"Suffer," he says flatly and there's a coughed laugh from the backseat.

“We’ll buy you some,” Phil says as Tommy narrows his eyes, lips drawing back to bare teeth, Techno’s head tilting as he’s regarded with a blank look. “We need to pick up some breakfast anyway.”

“And coffee,” Techno says after a moment, reaching to turn the key in the ignition.

He pauses, hand veering to press a button on the dash, and there’s a noise, the door beside him locking shut with a firm *click*.

“Child lock engaged,” Techno says with some satisfaction.

“I’m gonna murder you,” Tommy mutters, voice dripping with venom as Phil chokes on a laugh, “steal your socks and wear them at your funeral as I dance on your fucking *grave* .”

-

“Where are we going anyway?” Tommy grumbles as he hoists himself into the backseat, ignoring the judging slide of eyes from Techno as he carefully shifted to climb past Phil, doing his level best not to touch the man-

The car veers into sudden harsh turn and he lurches with the motion, careening down to land into the fold of an arm that darts out to brace his fall.

“Asshole,” he tells the ceiling with feeling as Phil’s eyes glitters with mirth just above him.

Techno lets out a rough snort.

“You okay, mate?” Phil asks as he’s helped up with surprising strength, easily supporting him until he shrugged the man’s hands roughly off him.

Tommy still doesn’t know what to make of the man and the strange prickling feeling that flares up inside of him whenever he so much as *looks* at Phil is- yeah, *fuck no* .

“I’m *fine*,” Tommy grumbles, ears tipping red as he settled on his knees on the seat, throwing Techno a warning look through the rearview mirror before he stretched out to hoist himself over the back, grabbing for his jacket and yanking it into his arms.

He has to tip nearly entirely over to reach his fucking sneakers but he grabs them before sliding back, twisting roughly to settle himself down beside Phil.

“Well?” he demands as he meets Techno’s eyes in the mirror. “You gonna fucking answer?”

“It’s a surprise,” Techno answers with a flash of teeth that shows off too sharp canines on both rows. “You like those, don’t you? Considering you’re allowing Wilbur to remodel your entire bedroom.”

“Sure.” Tommy drags his shoes over his bare feet with a grimace at the feeling. “I like them just as much as being yanked out of the bed at fucking 5 am in the morning.”

“You weren’t supposed to be there in the first place,” Techno drawls with a look Tommy can’t read.

“We’re really gonna do this?” he demands as hot white frustrations bubbles through him with a clenching of his fists that he shoves roughly into the pocket of his hoodie as he slumps back, shoulder knocking against Phil’s before he curves himself closer to the door. “You people have some fucking issues,” he breathes with a huff. “What, *exactly*, is wrong with us sharing a bed?”

He’d done it with Dream for *years* and there had never been anything fucking weird about it. It quieted his thoughts and lessened his anxiety to be able to open his eyes and see his mentor right beside him, alive and visibly breathing with the rise and fall of his chest.

Techno’s brow dips and a strange kind of uncomfortable look passes over his face before it smooths out.

“Used to sharing yours?” he asks with a dip of his voice.

“Techno,” Phil warns mildly.

Tommy lifts his foot and kicks it roughly into the back of the man’s seat.

“Don’t be fucking *weird*,” Tommy growls as he does it again, *harder*, making sure to dig the heel of his sneaker in as glares into the mirror, something strange and hot like embarrassment twining tight in his chest alongside the fury. “He’d- *don’t fucking imply shit like that!*”

Techno makes a low dismissive sound but his shoulders eases down.

Tommy slams his shoulders back hard into the seat and turns to glare out the window.

“It’s just concern,” Phil says with a gentling of his tone beside him as Tommy drops both feet down on the car rug. “We’re here to learn about each other, try to relax a bit.”

“I’m not gonna fucking *relax*,” Tommy bites out, “when he’s saying weird shit like *that*.” He turns, meeting shockingly blue eyes with a strange swoop of his belly, nails sinking reflexively into the palms of his hands. “D- he’d never fucking take advantage of me like that!”

The fucking implication that *Dream* had-

Tommy’s rage claws thick and sharp through him, something ugly and wrathful in the path of it as his shoulders curls tense, jaw clenching tight with a baring of teeth.

“Techno,” Phil says without looking away from him.

“My apologies,” Techno says with a low sigh and Tommy turns sharply towards him.

“There’s nothing weird about sharing a bed if it brings both of you comfort,” he tacks on with a look as the car slid to a halt at a red light. “Wil and I still share a bed, occasionally.”

Tommy meets his eyes for a moment longer but-

He slumps back, shoulders at his ears as he glares back out the window.

-

They turn in to order food and Phil slips out of the car as Tommy half-climbs over Techno to order something other than the stupid *toy meal*, ignoring the amused curl of the man's lip as he deftly raised a hand to catch the elbow Tommy aimed for his throat.

He still orders it, the absolute fucking *dickhead*, and Tommy shoves the strange round wooden thing with a wrap of a string into his pocket with a glower, ears tipped red.

"Here." Phil slides back into the car waiting in the parking lot, throwing him a pair of dark blue socks with a smile.

Tommy blinks at them, surprised he'd actually bothered.

"Thanks," he manages a bit grudgingly as he lifts them up to snap the tag with his teeth, pausing a moment to stare at the small polar bears crowding up the edge of them with little cheerful Santa hats.

He slides Phil a look.

"To match your hoodie," the man says with a wink.

He's still wearing his dark navy one with the polar bear and seal, the same one he'd worn the day before and slept it.

He grunts.

Techno takes a long sip of his coffee, wrapper crinkling in his other hand as he bit into his sandwich as Tommy slides the socks over his feet.

"You all set?" Phil inquiries as Tommy slips back into his sneakers. "If you need a bathroom break--"

"Oh no, he can deal," Techno interrupts. "I'm not chasing him down in the parking lot."

"I'd *never*," Tommy lies blunt force with too much teeth.

Techno gestures meaningful and Phil laughs, the sound settling strange in Tommy's chest even as he tries his best to ignore it.

"I wouldn't have to if you hadn't fucking kidnapped me." He pries the wrapper off his own sandwich and bites into it with relish, chewing through mozzarella cheese and tomatoes with sudden ravenous hunger. "Can I ask you something?" he wonders through a mouthful. "Since we're doing this whole *getting to know each other* thing."

Techno tilts his head. "Depends."

“What kind of hybrid are you?” he asks bluntly, the man’s ears twitching back and then up with a low hum of consideration as he’s studied in the mirror.

It’s a shitty and rude question to ask, almost worse then asking for someone’s powers, a sort of social *taboo* that Tommy was using to his full advantage.

He’s truthfully not expecting an answer at all but-

“Piglin,” Techno says with meaningful flick of his ear and the gold that dangles in it.

“Huh.” Tommy blinks at him, swallowing his mouthful and reaching to wash it down with a sip of soda as he considers it. “That’s cool,” he settles on.

It had to be a bit of a crap situation actually. Mob hybrids, or even regular hybrids, weren’t exactly well liked to begin with. There were plenty of condescension, arguments on the internet and shit attitudes from people viewing them as little more than clever animals.

The Blood God hadn’t exactly endeared piglin hybrids to the general population. Which was a piss attitude and stupidity at the finest but it wasn’t like *Tommy* could do anything about it.

“Cool,” Techno echoes with a strange look. “I supposed that’s one word for it.”

“So, tell us something about yourself, Tommy.” Phil has his sandwich open, prying the row of pickles out only to hand them forward to Techno who drops them into his mouth with a tilt of his head and a satisfying crunch.

“Like what?” Tommy asks with a wrinkle of his nose, reluctantly easing back in his seat as he stares at Wilbur’s father with his blond hair and easy smile, dressed in a button-up and jeans, a comfortable looking black coat unbuttoned in the warmth of the car.

He wants to hate the man, on sheer principle, but he makes it very hard with he easy laughter and warm smiles that crinkles the corner of his eyes with little crowfeet.

“Wil mentioned you’ve been trying out some different hobbies,” Phil muses. “Got a favourite one so far?”

Tommy stares at him, and then he frowns, mulling it over. “I guess the knitting has been fun,” he admits after a long moment. “I, well, I tried fucking *ice skating* and that was pretty pog.”

The best thing to come from it had been Pogtopia and he longs to return to the wide stretch of ice and the wildness and beauty, to explore it properly, like Wilbur had promised they would.

Together.

“You did a good job with the scarf,” Phil says with a warm smile that makes Tommy’s neck prickle and he looks away in favour of staring a hole into the backrest in front of him.

Techno snorts. “Wil’s been showing that thing off *everywhere*. Wouldn’t shut up about it for an entire week.”

“Jealous?” Tommy asks, unable to help himself as he uses his foot to push up to properly see the man in the mirror. “I bet you’d look *real cute* with a pair of pink mittens to match your hair.”

“... Please refrain from calling me *cute* ever again,” Techno begs, face twisting strange as Phil cackles.

“Alright pretty boy,” Tommy hums, mouth curling with a smirk at the long-suffering look.

-

By the time buildings trade away to long stretches of nothing but trees and nature Tommy is starting to wonder if Techno is a *liar* and he’s heavily suspecting he’s going to get murdered in the middle of nowhere because he’s an *idiot*.

He’s not at all reassured when they take a right into a snowy road amidst fences but then his eyes are widening and he’s unbuckling his seatbelt, lurching ungracefully over Phil who jerks with a start, head tilting to watch as Tommy presses his palm and face flat against the window.

Because right there, in the middle of the pasture, is a *horse*. Its coat a magnificent shining brown and mane golden blond, head rising with a breath that mists white in the cold morning air with a flaring of its nostrils.

“That’s a horse,” Tommy breathes, awe creeping through his voice.

“That’s Carl,” Techno corrects, fondness in the warmth of his voice as the car rolls to a stop. “He’s a friend.”

Tommy tears his eyes away to blink at the man but Techno is already slipping out of the car, boots sinking into the snow, and he trails his gaze, watching with a strange clenching in his chest as the man easily hauled himself over the fence of the pasture. Like he’d done it a hundred times before.

Tommy thinks that it’s likely that he has.

Techno is smiling, a thing that softens his face into something else entirely, his pink braid trailing long down his back, hands rising to slide down Carl’s face as the horse lowered its head to press against his chest with a flick of its tail and ears.

“Techno has always struggled when it comes to connecting with other people,” Phil tells him with an odd undertone. “Being a piglin hybrid didn’t help. People always fear what they don’t understand and judge him because of it.”

There’s a moment of silence between them as they watch Techno’s mouth move, his hands steady and sure as the slide down a long strong neck, a large head craning around to nudge against his side.

Tommy realizes there’s a small braid woven into the mane, just behind Carl’s ear, and his fingers reaches up to touch against the same spot in his own hair, index and middle finger

trapping a lock with a strange tug in his chest as he watches them.

"I love my boys." Tommy's shoulders tense tight and he slowly turns around to meet steady blue eyes. "Don't make me regret allowing you into their lives, Tommy."

-

Tommy makes his escape from the car not long after, throwing a glance at Phil who'd gone back to reading his book before trotting up to slouch down against the fence post.

It really is a pretty horse, coat shining in the morning sun, eyes large round and black.

A pretty horse for a pretty man, Tommy's brain pipes up and he huffs, slumping further down and letting his chin sink into the warmth of his jacket.

"Is this why you woke me up so early?" he asks, mostly to distract himself.

"I don't visit him every day." Techno's gloves have been tucked away and there's a comb working steady down the large body of the horse. "But I'm going to be working late the next week so he needed a check-up." A wry twist of his mouth. "I didn't expect Wil to bring you home out of the blue."

"To be fair, I didn't expect to have my entire bedroom remodeled either," Tommy huffs.

He's very aware of the fact that his Hero suit is still packed away under his bed but- he's strangely enough not worried about it. Wilbur had poked his nose into his kitchen cupboard and cooed over the little knitted creatures he'd been entertaining himself with making, but he hadn't made a single motion to touch anything in his room, asking before moving the furniture, his attention on the walls.

"He won't tell me what he's doing either," Tommy grumps. "I don't know what the fuck he thinks painting my walls are going to do."

"About what?" Techno asks, ducking beneath Carl's neck to round around to the other side of him. "Your atrocious style?"

"What do you know about my style, huh?" Tommy straightens in his slouch. "Maybe I have *magnificent* style."

"Somehow I doubt it," Techno drawls. "You picked *Wil* as your friend, that's a warning sign right there."

"You're his *brother*."

"Adopted," Techno deadpans and Tommy chokes on a startled bark of laughter. "The decision was entirely out of my hands." He spreads them out for emphasis. "Phil has atrocious taste in children."

"That sounds horrendously wrong," Tommy marvels with delight only to startle when Carl blows out a harsh breath, heavy legs shifting with a throw of his head and a shrug of his large

shoulders.

“Don’t be a baby,” Techno chides before he makes a low *chuff-chuff-chuff* noise that makes Carl’s ears perk as he stills, head lowering back with a twitch of his tail, allowing the combing to start up again. “Yeah, that’s what I thought.”

Tommy slowly relaxes his shoulders, blinking at them both.

Techno’s gaze slides towards him. “Do you want to pet him?”

“Can I?” Tommy perks up, pushing out of his slump and pressing both palms down against the fence post, frog leaping over it with a brief bend of his knees. “I’ve never petted a horse before,” he confides as Techno takes a step back and motions him up beside him. “How do I-?”

Carl is much bigger up close, Tommy realizes, halting a bit unsure as the long neck rises, black eyes peering towards him with a rippling stilling of its body.

“Here-“ A hand wraps around his wrist, tugging him closer with a bump of his back against the man’s chest as he stepped forward to brace him.

The heat of Techno’s skin prickles against his as his palm is guided forward, settling with a spread of his fingers against a thick coat.

He can feel the rise and fall of the horse’s large chest and he swallows as Techno guides him firm down the neck to the bony outline of its shoulder, hyper aware of both the press of his chest against his back and the warm alive creature that towers up above them both.

His hand is gently released and Tommy’s heart aches strangely for its return.

But Techno doesn’t step away, remaining close behind him as Tommy falls into the soothing rhythm of petting, letting his palm stroke as strong and sure like the man behind him.

He wonders what it must look like, with Techno astride its broad back, braid trailing long and elegant behind him.

He fancies that he must look rather like the ancient warriors of old.

-

“Wilbur said you’d been struggling with cooking,” Techno says in the car, Carl long left behind.

Tommy had watched the horse follow them along the pasture until the road disappeared amidst the trees, that feeling of awe still lingering in his chest.

“What about it?” Tommy asks distractedly as he fiddles with the cube Techno had thrown him.

It's shaped like a dice, with the smooth corners, but instead of numbers every side have something different for his fingers to press, touch and roll.

His favourite so far is the smooth round metal ball that rolls beneath the stroke of his thumb, the surface trading out for three notched wheels that looks rather like the ones used on number combination locks.

"See, Wil can't cook for shit either." Tommy makes a mental note of that. "And I didn't drag Phil along for no good reason."

Tommy pauses, glancing towards the man who had picked the right seat this time, one leg folded over the other, elbow braced against the hold on the door with his book open, half-way through it.

"You mean my company isn't enough for you, mate?" Phil drawls with a flick of his eyes and a grin.

"I'm not watching the children on my own," Techno says flatly.

"Children?" Tommy echoes in confusion as the car takes a turn into a parking lot in a surprisingly nice area where trees span between the apartment buildings. "What the fuck do you mean by *children*."

-

Tommy curses, twisting against the hold of his hoodie as he's forcefully yanked back, an arm looping around his waist and hauling him face-first into Techno's chest, muffling him with the fold of an arm around his head.

"I apologize for him in advance," Techno huffs as Tommy presses both palms flat against his chest along with a knee and braces himself to push furiously.

"Um." Ranboo slowly opens the door wider and Phil offers him a smile and a clap of his shoulder as he steps past him. "You sure about this?"

"Some socializing is good for him," Techno sighs, shifting to bodily hauling him up in a single swoop, ignoring Tommy's furious scrabbling against his back and loud swearing. "Think of him as a particularly feral dog." A pause. "Or *raccoon*."

"I'll *kill you*," Tommy growls as he's carried inside, door closing shut behind him along with any hope of escape with the click of the lock sliding into place. "I did not fucking consent to any of this bullshit!" He twists, grabbing and yanking hard on Techno's braid-

Tommy is dropped like a sack of flour, chest heaving as he glares furiously up at the ceiling.

He bares his teeth at Ranboo as the other teen bends over to peer down at him.

"You're *first*," he promises with a vicious curl of his lips.

Chapter End Notes

Ah, bedrock bros my beloved <3

See, I told you guys I was excited to get working on this chapter and here we are. Two days later. I'm giving myself a pat on the back for the speed of this one.

Is this kidnapping? Who knows. Arguably the answer is yes but no-one tell Tommy.

Just to clarify - there's absolutely nothing weird about sharing a bed with someone. But Techno has genuinely no-idea where Tommy has popped up from and there's some bad stuff out there in the world.

I love all of your people to absolute death, thank you endlessly for being here and having fun with me on this journey of Hush Now. Let me just drop this chapter on all of you and go back to reread you comments.

Until next chapter :)

-

We. Have so much fanart. Dudes. I blinked between one chapter and the next and I was kinda blown away and it's 2 am and I *think* I got them all added up below? I'll double check in the morning but if not I'll fix it, yeah? And - I reblog everything on my tumblr [corpse-art](#) so feel free to swing by there :)

Thank you all so so much. It's absolutely fucking amazing to see it and it makes me very, very happy.

(If I link your art and you want, for whatever reason, for me to remove or change anything just let me know, yeah?)

On that note - ART:

[Red Chaos concept art by NYMIS](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[A Conversation by panddraw for chapter 8](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[Photo Taken Seconds Before Disaster by owlwinter8 for chapter 10](#)

[An encounter with the angel of death for chapter 2 by owlwinter8](#)

[Tommy doesn't look like a civilian by owlwinter8 for chapter 9](#)

[You look like a Tommy to me by hiblue for chapter 9](#)

[Red Chaos concept art by void-ant](#)

[Tommy in Dream vs Wilbur hoodie by Eu_nyx for chapter 9](#)

[Cooking with the angel of death for chapter 2 by scytheart](#)

[I make threats not promises Tommyinnit by 100-reasons-sbi](#)

[Tommy and the Blood God by jellyswissroll for chapter 1](#)

[Are we friends Wilbur by owlwinter8 for chapter 3](#)

[Learning to cook by owlwinter8 for chapter 2](#)

[You Got Me a Christmas Present by lilacadaisy for chapter 3](#)

[THIS IS OUR POGTOPIA by hiblue for chapter 4](#)

[Red Chaos by fridges](#)

Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy, hands shoved into his pockets and slouched down on the couch, claws his nails into his thighs and glares mulishly onwards.

Techno, seated opposite him, because this fucking place is *weird* and has *entirely* too many fucking couches, is watching him with a steady levelled look that doesn't say much at all.

He doesn't *look* frustrated with Tommy's refusal to join whatever the *fuck* is going on behind him in the kitchen-

Which is *loud* and *noisy* and there's fucking *Ranboo* and *Tubbo* and *Phil-fucking-whatever* and the kitchen smells *sweet* and *sugary* and he *doesn't want to know* because he's not *interested* and he doesn't want to *fucking be here* and-

His fingers twitches and he sinks deeper down, shoulders practically at his ears.

Tommy, as much as he loathes to admit it, feels entirely out of his depth.

He doesn't like the feeling. At all.

He drags his nails over his thighs and then twists his right to pick at his nailbeds with jerky little motions, chewing on the inside of his cheek, and only just resists the urge to bounce his leg as he tilts his head back to stare at the ceiling.

He forces his breathing to remain calm, levelling it carefully, letting his chest expand and lower at a pace that is *supposed* to soothe some of the anxiety that crawls beneath his skin like ants but *instead* makes him hyperaware of his own breathing and *fucking hell*-

"Tommy."

His mouth twists.

"They're not going to bite you." Techno's voice is dry but there's an undertone of something else that Tommy refuses to acknowledge. "Look-"

"Can you just-" Tommy's voice breaks and he swallows. "Can you just *not*," he manages, leg twitching once before he forcefully stills it. "I'm *here* so just- fucking *leave me alone*."

He would have been fucking *out* if he had his fucking *phone* but he doesn't and he's not about to ask Techno to borrow his.

That would be admitting defeat and Tommy *doesn't do that*.

He's just gonna sit here and then he's going to leave and he's going back to Wilbur and he's going to do all of that without committing a single fucking crime.

There's a yelp from Ranboo as he scrambled to grab Tubbo from adding *something* and Tommy's shoulders jerks up before he forces them down, back rippling tense.

Techno huffs, shifting to lean forward, drawing Tommy's attention with a flick of his blue eyes as the man clasped his hands together between his knees, mouth curling thoughtfully.

"I don't like interacting with people much either," the man tells him finally. "But your, uh, social anxiety is looking a bit bad there."

"Fuck off," Tommy bites out. "I don't have social *anything*."

"I can see that." Techno's brow creases briefly and then smooths out as he sighs. "Interacting with people your own age is good for you."

Tommy digs hard into the bed nail of his thumb as his grin twists with more teeth than lip. "And you're the one to decide that for me, huh? Because you know me *so fucking well*."

"Have you even spoken to another teenager?" Techno challenges with a glittering knowing look that gnaws at him. "You didn't have any trouble talking to me or Wil so what is it about Ranboo and Tubbo that sets you so on edge?"

"They're assholes," Tommy snaps defensively.

"*I'm* an asshole, by your own words, and yet you don't look ready to throw yourself out a window at the mere prospect of interacting with me."

Tommy jerks his head aside, nail slipping to tear hard enough to draw blood.

He ignores it, picking harder, muscles rippling as Techno rose suddenly, taking a step past the miniscule table that was somehow meant to function with the four odd mismatched couches, and sinks to a knee in front of him with a flaring of his nose.

"Give me your hand."

"*Fuck you*," Tommy says slowly and with emphasis.

"I'll call Phil," Techno says calmly. "And he'll fuss."

Tommy's hand twists into a fist.

"Piglin," the man reminds him, tapping a finger against the side of his nose. "I can smell the *blood*."

Phil's laughter echoes from the kitchen and Tommy's mouth thins before he reluctantly yanks his hand out of his pocket and shoves it at the man, head turning away to stare anywhere but at him.

He's hyperaware of the warm hands that fold around his, turning his palm up, thumbs dragging down along it to force his fingers to unroll with a twitchy spasm as he sucked in a hard breath, forcing himself to breath out through his nose as his fingers were silently inspected.

"You didn't bring the fidget toy?" Techno asks finally.

"Fidget *what*?" Tommy echoes blankly, turning to look at him.

"You fidget. A lot," Techno says wryly. "Wil mentioned that you often have band aids around your fingers. They're supposed to help."

Tommy's brow furrows. "Like- the twisty thing. And the cube."

Techno hums.

"Oh." Tommy stares at him, something fluttering strange in his chest. "You got them for me?"

"They're my old ones." An odd look passes through the man's gaze before it's replaced by a contemplative one and he lets out a sigh and releases his hand. "Come on, child." Techno straightens out. "I believe Ranboo has a package of band aids in the bathroom."

-

He does, it turns out.

Ridiculously cute ones with little black cats crowding against different colourful backgrounds and Tommy gets one for each finger on his right hand.

They look terribly judgemental with their big round eyes.

Techno tucks the package back into the cupboard behind the mirror and closes it shut, hand lingering with a brief tapping of his fingers before he let it fall at his side.

Tommy, seated on the toilet lid, flexes his hand, straining the stiff glue of it into something more natural as he stares at the other.

"Why did you invite them anyway?" he asks finally and Techno's oddly coloured eyes flicks towards him.

Eyes he finally has an explanation for.

"I thought," Tommy adds a bit mulishly, "that it was just going to be the two of us but first you dragged Phil into it and now-" He bites down on his lip, turning away with an uncomfortably shift of his shoulders. "I don't fucking get it."

And maybe, a tiny small part of him, had been *curious* about what it would be like to hang out with Wilbur's *brother*. Just the two of them.

“You’re both two of my favourite people,” Wilbur had said, his voice warm.

He feels strangely cheated.

“I made an assumption,” Techno admits gruffly. “And it turns out I was wrong.”

Tommy furrows his brows. “What the fuck is that supposed to mean?” he demands.

“I don’t do people,” Techno admits, a hand sliding to rub against his neck in a motion that reminds him so achingly of Dream that Tommy’s fingers fold tight. “Conversations... aren’t really my thing.” A wry twist. “I thought having other people here would make it easier for you and me both.”

“Well, you thought wrong,” Tommy manages after a moment, staring at him.

Techno huffs. “I’m not wrong about you needing to work on your social skills, they’re worse than *mine* and that’s saying something.” His head tilts. “Why don’t you like Phil?”

Tommy’s mouth twists into a grimace. “Fuck if I’m telling you.”

“Ranboo then?”

“He was a bitch.”

“Tubbo?”

“An even bigger bitch.” Tommy blows a breath, rustling the too long strands of his fringe away from where they had been creeping down to shadow his eyes. “Why do you even care? I’m only here because of Wilbur.” He stares dully at the man. “I can tolerate a lot of shit but I’m not interested in people. *I don’t like people.*”

“You like Wilbur.”

“Wilbur is *different*.” He thinks of soft touches and intensity that creeps a shiver down his back as it brushes all the dark possessive and lonely parts of him. “Wilbur gets me,” Tommy says almost absently, fingers touching against his chest, just above his heart. “They don’t even want me here, I’m not an idiot.” His mouth curls with too much teeth as he meets maroon eyes. “*You* don’t want me here, not really, I’m only tolerated because of Wilbur. The only reason I’m here is because of *him*. The rest of you don’t give a single fuck and yet expect *me* to. Some would say that’s pretty fucked-up.”

Techno regards him silently and it makes something vicious and sharp dig crawl up his throat.

“You want to pry me open, want me to give you my secrets, but you don’t want to *know me*. You couldn’t prevent me from invade from your brother’s life so instead you’re stuck making sure I’m not going to fucking stab him in the back or some shit. I get that.” Tommy shrugs, leaning back against the cold porcelain behind him with a roll of his neck. “But don’t expect me to play along to your games when you don’t give me a reason to. I have some fucking self-respect.”

“I don’t show Carl to just anyone.” Techno shifts to lean back against the door with a folding of his arms. “I’m trying here.”

“And I’m not?” Tommy challenges. “You’ve been manhandling me all fucking day and I haven’t stabbed a single person. I deserve a fucking medal or some shit.” He folds his arms up tight. “I could have left, if I really fucking wanted to, but I’m here because it means something to Wilbur. Because *you* mean something to him.”

“And Phil?”

Tommy narrows his eyes. “You gonna be fucking stuck on that?”

“He’s my adoptive father but he’s also my *friend*,” Techno says simply. “*My first one*, since that appears to mean something to you. If you house any ill-will towards him-“

“I don’t,” Tommy interrupts uncomfortably. “I just- fuck off. I’ve never met anyone’s fucking *parent* before. He’s weird. I don’t get him.”

The man raises a pink brow. “*Never?*”

“Never,” Tommy hisses. “So fuck off about it, alright?”

“You don’t make sense.” Techno stretches out with a roll of his shoulders. “You turn up from nowhere, all snapping and yapping. You try to keep a distance but you can’t because you’re drawn to Wilbur like a moth to flame-“

“I like moths,” Tommy mutters.

“- and you’re set off by the strangest of things.” Techno’s eyes flickers dark. “I see the way you move, how you’re always watching even when you’re pretending you’re not. You’re good at that. Someone trained you and then got rid off you.” His mouth curls with teeth, canines sharp. “Did they tire of you? Or are you just biding your time until you can return to them?”

Tommy’s mouth twists, shoulders and back wiring tense.

“You were quick to defend him in the car, whoever he is.” Techno looks at him, steady and challenging. “What exactly are you doing here, Tommy?”

Tommy remains silent, teeth sinking into the inside of his cheek.

“Do you even know yourself?” The man challenges him. “Something is keeping you back, or rather *someone*, and I don’t trust that. I don’t *trust you*.” There’s a weight in the air between them. “And yet,” Techno’s voice levels out into a rumble, “I’m here and you’re here and Wilbur wants you to stay and that’s what I have to work with. So I’m *trying*. Unlike you.”

He jerks up, eyes flashing and mouth opening sharp-

“Oh don’t pretend otherwise,” Techno cuts off sharply before he can get as much as a sound out. “You allow people to push and shove at you but you’re not the one reaching out, you’re

just along for the ride, your loyalty anchored elsewhere. You're lost, adrift and cast aside, drowning in your own self-pity and struggling to stay afloat. You have Wilbur offering you everything and you're still struggling for different a shore." His mouth curl into a smile that sends an icy chill down Tommy's spine. "Tell me I'm wrong."

"You *are* wrong you fucking *dickhead*," Tommy snarls furiously. "I'm fucking *trying* but nothing I do is apparently enough for you!"

"You're all pretty words and nothing to prove them with." Techno flicks a dust of lint off his arm. "How do I know you even care for Wilbur at all and aren't just falling into old patterns? Using him as some *substitute*."

"He-" Tommy chokes on anger that wraps thick with needles and claws in his throat. "How fucking *dare you*-"

"How dare *I*?" Techno takes a step towards him with a roll of his back to push away from the door. "How dare *you*?" he growls.

"I'm here, aren't I!?" Tommy shoots to his feet, arm snapping out in a violent jerky sweep.

"Because I didn't give you a choice about it," Techno rumbles darkly with a twisting of his lips and a sharp jutting of his lower canines.

"You didn't even give a fucking chance you absolute fucking *asshole*!" Tommy's hands balls tight at his sides. "You just yanked me out of bed like I'm some misbehaving *dog* you just happened to get fucking stuck with! Like you didn't agree to it in the first place! And you expect me to be *happy* about it!? How goddamn delusional are you?"

"You-"

"*Boys*." Phil's voice cuts Techno short, Tommy's breath choking oddly in his chest with a sharp flare of *danger* that he doesn't understand as he jerks back, heart pounding, Techno still watching him keenly as he stumbles and nearly trips on the shower curtains, one hand darting out to grasp tight. "We can *hear you*."

Tommy's chest rises and falls, his breathing short, heavy and loud in the silence that stretches out between them.

"Techno?"

"I've got it."

There's a moment and then Phil's steps can be heard moving away and Tommy is once again left alone with Techno who lets out a rough breath, hand rising to drag down his face.

"*This*," Techno says finally, his voice strangely tight, "is why I invited *people*."

"Fuck you," Tommy rasps, swallowing thickly. "I don't get what you fucking *want* from me."

“The truth.” The man tilts his head, braid sliding over his shoulder with the motion, eyes more red than brown in the harsh bright lightness. “*Everything.*” A low huff. “But you won’t give me that.”

“Here’s some news for you buddy.” Tommy slowly lets go of the shower curtain, wiping his hand on his pants with an ugly grimace. “But I don’t exactly fucking trust you one bit either.”

Techno snaps his teeth with a sharp sound. “Which means we’re at an impasse.”

“Or we can do what Wilbur actually asked us to do,” Tommy says, his voice dry and hoarse, a strange ill-ease still clinging to his shoulders. “And *get to know each other*. Which would be so much *easier* if you fuckers would lay off my back for one *goddamn* minute.”

“That’s now how I do things.”

“That sounds like a *you* problem,” Tommy huffs. “No one just gives you their fucking life story at your first meeting.”

“Ranboo did,” Techno says with a flick of his ears.

Tommy gives him a disbelieving look. “The fuck? Is he on drugs? The *hell*? You can’t expect me to do the *same*. I have some fucking sense *thank you*.”

“Sure,” the man drawls. “*Sense.*”

“*Fuck you,*” Tommy says with feeling, one hand creeping to rub against the power dampener that pulses warmly against his wrist, all too aware that *physically* he’s no match against the brute strength of the piglin hybrid in front of him.

Techno had already proven to be *fast* and it should be surprising but Tommy has had his breath sucker punched out of his gut before from civilians who’d managed to catch him off-guard in panic and anger, fury and grief alike.

Heroes and Villain aren’t the only ones who can fight. Civilians find plenty of reasons and Tommy had been street savvy in survival long before Dream found him.

Hybrids tended to find more reasons than most.

Still-

“Where the hell did you learn to fight anyway?” he asks with a leery sort of interest.

Techno hums, his body language easing back as he leant back against the door. “Here and there. You?”

“Here and there,” Tommy shoots back smartly.

They stare at each other.

“Point taken,” Techno snorts, mouth twisting with a wry sort of amusement. “So?”

“So *what?*”

“*So,*” Techno repeats with emphasis. “Where do we go from here?”

“You tell me,” Tommy scoffs, dropping back roughly on the toilet seat with a kick of his leg. “We can keep going in circles if you *really* want to.”

“And deal with Wil’s puppy eyes?” Techno doesn’t sound very enthused by the prospect and Tommy’s mouth twitches despite himself. “Yeah, no, I’d rather *not*.” The man levels him with a keen look of consideration. “What would it take for you to go out there and play nice?”

“You looking to strike a bargain?” Tommy tips his head and upper body with the motion.

“For Wilbur,” Techno cautions him with a wary flick of his ears.

Tommy’s mouth thins with consideration, regarding the man in his soft white sweater and long pink hair braided thick behind him.

Tall, strangely graceful, danger hidden behind a pretty surface and brown eyes stained with the colour of blood.

“I don’t know,” Tommy says finally. “What would it take for *you* to get off my fucking back about Wilbur?”

“I’m not doing that,” the man tells him with a flaring of his nose. “He’s my brother, he’s *family*, and I don’t leave family to the whims of a strange child.”

Wilbur’s brother is an oddity that Tommy doesn’t know what to make of but there’s curiosity and a grudging sort of respect for his stubborn refusal to bend.

He supposes he understands where Wilbur is coming from when he says they aren’t too different.

“*Impasse,*” Techno repeats with a sigh.

“Yeah,” Tommy mutters with a grimace.

The silence stretches between them, heavy and strange as Techno keeps watching him, studying him, as if he could pick Tommy apart just by looking at him.

And Tommy thinks of Dream, who struggles with attachment, who looks at George with soft eyes and pink that flushes across his cheeks with a ducking of his head, hand climbing nervous to rub against the back of his neck when the older man would tease him back.

He thinks of Dream who shies and craves affection in the same breath, who clings tighter than even Tommy on bad days, falling apart as Tommy wraps around him, pressing his forehead against the mark that brands his mentor’s neck, preventing anymore furious clawing as Dream chokes and wheezes and laughs with sharp jagged pieces lodged deep in his throat and heart.

“I liked,” Tommy begins haltingly, “that you showed me Carl today.” Techno’s right ear flicks back. “I mean, a horse isn’t a *cow* but it was still-“ He falters, swallows. “Look- I’m not *ungrateful* for whatever the hell all of this is supposed to be, alright? I stand by the fact that I’d rather *not* be fucking yanked out of the bed at five am but you wanted to see your-friend, or whatever, and I’m not about to hold grudges about it.” His mouth thins. “I appreciate the whole *cooking thing* because I’m genuinely shit at it and I’m getting real fucking tired of fried rice.”

He misses *potatoes* and *steak* and *pasta* that isn’t fucking *ramen noodles* but he doesn’t know where the hell to even start.

His attention and energy drains right out of his soul whenever he looks at a fucking recipe and the restlessness creeps up at him at the most inopportune moments, leaving him frustrated and furious and so very fucking *tired*.

Some days he thinks he might just be drowning on dry land.

“And I don’t even *care* about the manhandling, not really, thought some *warning* would have been nice.” Tommy drags a hand through his hair, mouth twisting. “Look, I’m just doing my best, alright? I didn’t plan to meet Wilbur, but I did, and now I can’t just fucking *leave him* because he’s- he’s fucking *Wilbur*, alright?” He looks up a bit helplessly. “I don’t get him, but at the same time *I do*, he’s- fuck, I don’t even *know*, but he’s- he’s *genuinely* a really fucking cool guy.”

“He is,” Techno agrees, eyes unreadable.

“Yeah,” Tommy says breathlessly. “And- I can promise that my mentor- he wouldn’t hurt Wilbur.”

“We don’t kill, that’s the first rule.”

“We don’t hurt civilians.”

“It doesn’t matter, Tommy! If I get hurt- that’s what being a Hero is! If I can save just one person-“

His nails digs into his palm as he swallows, remembering all too well the smiling mask that had watched him silently as he crouched over the unconscious form of the Villain beneath him, hearing the shallow breathing, feeling the steady heartbeat beneath his palm, the ghostly press of cold metal in his hand-

“I wouldn’t allow it,” he adds, more sure this time as he looks up to meet red tinted eyes, steady with determination that pounds with the beating of his heart.

“You can’t promise that,” Techno refutes with a dark glimmer in his eyes. “We live in a corrupt society where even the Heroes, the supposedly *just protectors of the people*, can’t make a promise like that.”

“But *I* can,” Tommy breathes and it feels like a revelation, a clarity amidst the muddled second guessing he’s been doing for *months* now. “I can,” he repeats, something giddy blooming in his chest as his eyes brightens glittering blue with he spreading of his smile. “*I can*, Techno.”

On his feet are the socks Phil had bought him, matching the seal and polar bear on his sweater.

Sealzzz slanting over the seal in a trail upwards, *Polar Snores* in bolded letters trailing down from a mouth open wide in sleep.

Dream had gotten it for him two weeks after his fifteenth birthday, for whatever reason.

He hadn’t worn it until November had crept back around and it mysteriously appeared on his bed after spending several months stuffed into the back of his wardrobe, half-forgotten and very much ignored.

It’s tacky, far from one of his favorites, and yet he treasures it simply because of the person who had given it to him.

“You don’t need to know anything about my mentor.” Tommy’s grin is sharp. “I won’t tell you anything anyway, I made a promise and I’m keeping that, but you don’t *have* to know anything about him. You just have to believe *me* when *I* say *I* wouldn’t do anything to hurt Wilbur. That I’d protect him with my *life*.”

Because that’s the kind of Hero had Tommy had sworn to be – to do *better* than the Heroes before him, at Dream’s side as he challenged the very *world*.

There’s a reason he drags the Blood God home instead of calling the Heroes on him.

There’s a *reason* he protects Siren, even against his own mentor who he’d sworn his loyalty to.

The world is a shitty place, corrupt and ugly in the worst of ways, but L’Manberg is where he’d been born and raised and even when he hates it, he protects it, and the people in it.

Maybe it’s naïve. Maybe it’s impossible. But whatever the *hell* is going on with his mentor-

There’s a reason as to why Dream went after Siren that night, Tommy has to believe that or he has *nothing*. And he’ll get it out of his mentor, one way or the other, and then- and *then* he’ll deal with that when it comes to it.

Even if-

“Heh.” Techno’s mouth slowly curls into a dark grin. “Fancy yourself a Hero?”

“I don’t need to be a Hero to promise that,” Tommy scoffs, hands curling around the edge of the seat between his legs as he slouches forward.

The man hums, regarding him with a curious glimmer of his eyes.

“There is no happy ending for Heroes, Tommy.” Techno rolls his shoulders. “Want some life advice? Don’t become one.”

Too late, Tommy thinks but does not say.

He doubts Techno would believe him even if he did. No one looks at a sixteen-year-old and thinks *Hero*.

No one looks at *Tommy* and thinks *Red Chaos*.

Because the world doesn’t know anything about him. He doesn’t do interviews, the exact nature of his and Dream’s relationship gets speculated on to death, and Tommy-

Tommy is *Tommy*.

Shaggy blond hair with a swooping curl, blue eyes and tacky hoodies. He has no formal education or papers, no proof of existence other than the fact that his heart is beating and lungs still breathing.

He’s a street kid and then he’s a Hero. It’s the kind of fairy tale nonsense stories get written about.

“If I go out there and play *nice*,” Tommy says with a slow drawl. “You have to go with me and be fucking social.”

“Eh, fair enough,” Techno snorts. “It was my idea anyway.”

-

“Nice of you to join us,” Phil greets mildly with a glance over his shoulders, regarding his youngest son and the ragtag boy that Wilbur found himself so enamoured with.

He flicks his gaze to Techno, raising a brow in silent question, and he shrugs, nudging the scowling boy forward with a halting step and lips drawing back with a grimacing flash of teeth.

Raccoon, Techno had called him, and there is something almost animalistic in the way Tommy looks at them, constantly watching for a threat and yet failing to see what lurks behind the domestic facades they’d gotten used to upholding in public.

The wings on his back aches to stretch out, to spread wide, to unveil from the thick clog of magic that clings to them and hides them from sight, the heart pendant around his neck pulsing with the magic of his wife who had gifted it to him with a ghost of a kiss against his forehead.

“*My Angel*,” she’d called him, marking him with the veiling magic of death.

It had been with a wry sort of amusement he’d seen the name the world had bestowed upon him years later with the rising idea of *Heroes* and *Villains* that painted the world in broad black and white strokes with corporations heaving money in the business of saving lives.

Phil is thirty-four but he's been thirty-four for a very, *very* long time.

His return to society, after years of adventures, hadn't been the reassuring welcome back he'd hoped for, his life grounding to a halt with the dark clever eyes that peered up at from the thin face of a young boy curled around a too big guitar with missing strings.

Phil had taken him in, given him a home, a second chance. But Wilbur had never been able to forget those first years and Phil had been cautious about allowing him to join the Syndicate in the first place.

But his oldest had always been willful and stubborn, tugged by whims and desires with a glittering belief in his brown eyes.

Phil had watched that spark dim and fizzle out and then brighten anew with this boy who stands tense and unsure, impossibly awkward and close to Techno who reaches out, haltingly, to place a hand on Tommy's shoulder with a squeeze.

A strange look crosses his son's face when Tommy unwires, flicking a searching look up before drawing a breath with a cocky spread of his lips as he turns to meet Phil's gaze head-on.

"If we're gonna do this, then *I* want some say in it, and *I* want to learn how to make some fucking potatoes."

Admittedly, Phil finds the boy's daring amusing, even if he has no idea who he's talking to.

Tubbo is quiet, the dough he'd been kneading paused mid-roll, blue eyes peering towards Tommy with a cautious sort of glimmering curiosity.

Ranboo's face is more open, avidly focused on the youngest boy in the room.

He'd never liked conflict and Tommy's clear ire with him was sure to be bothering him, even if he wouldn't voice it in fear of causing more conflict.

Techno liked to say Ranboo had layers. Like an *onion*.

Phil thought the comparison more apt when it came to Tubbo who habitually tucked secrets close to his heart with an innocent stretch of his lips.

They're good kids. Dealt with odd cards that put them on very different paths in life, and yet not so different at all, both choosing their own destiny in the aftermath of it and becoming tangled in the web of the Syndicate because of it.

Ranboo had been lucky to meet Techno when he did.

Tubbo's history is messier, tied with Quackity who liked keeping an eye on both teens, even if he loudly proclaimed *not to give a shit*.

Phil found it amusing considering Quackity had bought out the entire apartment complex they were living in just to make sure they were safe.

“We’re making apple pie,” Ranboo offers awkwardly, one hand rising to flick his fringe to the side, mask firmly in place, and his sunglasses are tucked into the front pocket of his dark pink Hawaiian shirt with spreads of dark yellow flowers.

Tommy pauses, visibly processing it with a cat-like narrowing of his eyes as he focuses on the taller teenager, lips pulling back-

Techno raises his hand and flicks his ear.

Tommy twitches, arms crossing, but he *relents* much to Phil’s interest. “*Fine*,” he grumps. “But I’m not leaving until you show me how to *not* make potatoes into fucking mush.”

“You just put the timer on, bossman” Tubbo grins, turning to lean back against the counter. “Easy as pie.”

“You’ve already burnt two pies,” Ranboo points out helpfully. “*Today*.”

“*Easy as pie*,” Tubbo repeats without even blinking. “And I bet I make better ones than *you*.”

Tommy shoves his hands into his pocket, slouching unhappily. “I hate pie,” he mutters.

“How do you dislike *pie*?” Ranboo wonders, tone rising in pitch and hand shifting protectively over his perfectly nice apple pie that had just barely survived the many tries and attempts of Tubbo to add things which decidedly did not belong. “What did pie ever do to you?”

“It’s fucking evil, is what it is,” Tommy mutters with a twist of his lips. “And only *idiots* likes apples. It like the worst fucking combination ever.”

There’s something personal there, Phil notes, absently wondering if they might any blueberries in the freezer. It was possible. Ranboo liked his smoothies and while he didn’t much like blueberries himself he tended to keep some around for when Techno stopped by.

“I like ‘em,” Tubbo grins, snagging a red one and biting down with a wet crunch.

Tommy’s expression isn’t very impressed.

“Come on,” Techno snorts, bumping his shoulder with the blond boy. “I bet there’s blueberries in the freezer, right, Ranboo?”

“There is!” Ranboo perks up, taking a long step forward as Tommy takes a jerky back step to bump up against Techno who stills in surprise when he doesn’t move away, instead shifting just enough to just avoid pressing against him with an inch of space.

“I haven’t had blueberry pie in *ages*,” Tubbo notes as he takes another bite.

“I’m not sharing,” Tommy denies instantly. “Make your own fucking pie.”

“*Tommy*,” Techno groans. “You promised to *play nice*.”

"I *am*," Tommy mutters mulishly before his mouth thins unsurely. "Does Wilbur like blueberry pie?"

"Oh he *loves* them," Techno assures him with a flick of his ear.

It's a blatant lie. Wilbur hates blueberries.

"Right," Tommy says with determination, taking no note of the way Ranboo opens his mouth to deny it only to have Tubbo shift and trod down hard on his foot. "I'm sharing with *him* then. *There*," he says with satisfaction.

Phil hides a grin behind his hand.

For such a volatile boy there's a surprisingly soft side to him.

Chapter End Notes

Words go brrr.

I am so, so tired so you're getting such a tiny A/N today bcs I'mma cuddle my dog. Had a bit of a rough evening and I'm having an early day tomorrow with 8 hours in a car. Ayup.

Much love and adoration from me to you. I'm having a grand time hauling this story forward and oh boi do I have plans for you guys. Just. Need to get all the bits and pieces in place. Heh.

-

We. Have so much fanart. Dudes. I reblog everything on my tumblr [corpse-art](#) so feel free to swing by there :) I also post updates and stuff. Good vibes.

Thank you all so so much. It's absolutely fucking amazing to see it and it makes me very, very happy.

(If I link your art and you want, for whatever reason, for me to remove or change anything just let me know, yeah?)

On that note - ART:

[Road Trip by owlwinter8 for chapter 12](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER (also Philza approved)

[Red Chaos concept art by NYMIS](#)

[A Conversation by panddraw for chapter 8](#)

[Photo Taken Seconds Before Disaster by owlwinter8 for chapter 10](#)

[An encounter with the angel of death for chapter 2 by owlwinter8](#)

[Tommy doesn't look like a civilian by owlwinter8 for chapter 9](#)

[You look like a Tommy to me by hiblue for chapter 9](#)

[Red Chaos concept art by void-ant](#)

[Tommy in Dream vs Wilbur hoodie by Eu_nyx for chapter 9](#)

[Cooking with the angel of death for chapter 2 by scytheart](#)

[I make threats not promises Tommyinnit by 100-reasons-sbi](#)

[Tommy and the Blood God by jellyswissroll for chapter 1](#)

[Are we friends Wilbur by owlwinter8 for chapter 3](#)

[Learning to cook by owlwinter8 for chapter 2](#)

[You Got Me a Christmas Present by lilacadaisy for chapter 3](#)

[THIS IS OUR POGTOPIA by hiblue for chapter 4](#)

[Red Chaos by fridges](#)

Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“So, *Tommy*, who’s your favourite Hero?”

Ignore him, Tommy encourages himself as he kneads the ingredients in the galaxy painted bowl Ranboo had dug out from one of the cupboards. *If you don’t acknowledge him he’ll get bored and leave you alone-*

“It’s Valorant,” Techno answers for him, leaning back against the sink with one eye on Tommy, body-language loose and relaxed. “Kid’s real *hot* for him.”

“At least I’m not a Dream fanboy,” Tommy hisses spitefully.

Tubbo veers quickly to the pink haired man. “You’re a *Dream* fanboy now? Since when? Is this a *thing* we’re doing? Because I’ve always thought Dream was rather cool with the whole *smile* thing he’s doing.” Tubbo pokes both index fingers against the edges of his mouth and pushes them up demonstratively.

“His hoodies look soft,” Ranboo chimes in and Tommy has to bite back a response because they fucking *are*.

“Tommy.” Techno’s face twists with a mildly pained look. “Don’t give them ideas.”

“I’m not responsible for who you’re cru-“ His hand slaps down over his mouth and Tommy curves his smile razor sharp behind it.

“*Behave*,” Techno grits out as Phil turns away with a hand over his mouth, shoulders shaking with quiet laughter. “Or I’ll be forced to muzzle you.”

“Kinky.” Tubbo tilts his head, blue eyes bright with mischief when they meet Tommy’s and it twists something sharp and jagged inside of him. “I didn’t know you were into that kind of thing, Techno.”

“*Tubbo!*” Ranboo squawks. “Don’t say it like *that*.”

“All Heroes must fall,” Tubbo says seriously as he stretches up on his toes to pat the taller teen’s shoulder. “I’m sorry you had to find out like this, ‘Boo.”

“He’s not my Hero.” Ranboo looks rather horrified, Tommy notes with a funny thing unfurling in his chest as the taller teen hunches on himself. “Tubbo, please, as your future husband, *I beg of you to not*.”

“Then beg,” Tubbo agrees easily. “Hey, Techno-“

“No,” the piglin hybrid cuts him off. “Whatever you’re about to say just *no*. Phil-“

“You brought this entirely on yourself, mate,” Phil laughs, the sound bright and loud in the small kitchen. “Should have known one of them are bad enough but you wanted all three here. Little shits,” he tacks on fondly.

Tommy makes sure his tongue is covered in a thick glob of saliva before he sticks it out and flattens it in a broad swipe up an abnormally warm palm, taking great delight in the way Techno’s mouth clicks shut before his eyes slowly turns down to meet his with a wide-eyed disbelief.

“Who *raised you*. ” The hand gets snatched away. “*Phil* he goddamn *licked me*. ”

“Sounds like a you problem,” Phil chokes out as Ranboo reaches forward to turn the tap of water, wrist craning awkwardly to avoid getting wet before he snatched it back. “Reminds me of Wilbur, actually.” Tommy snaps towards Phil. “Do you recall-“

“I’d rather forget all about that,” Techno sighs as he pumps the soap dispenser aggressively. “Don’t give the feral child any ideas.”

“Which one of them?” Phil asks with clear humour.

“I’m behaving,” Ranboo folds his arms across his chest, all gangly limbs and brown too long-hair awkwardly combed aside and down.

“You’re guilty by fucking association.” Tommy bares his teeth. “I bet you’re a real *menace*, *Ranboob*. ”

“That’s not my name.”

“Sure, *Ranboob*. ”

“Repeating it won’t make it any truer, Tommy.”

“It’s okay, ‘Boob.’”

“*Tubbo*. ”

“What? A nickname means you’re close, right?” Tubbo smiles innocently. “Only *friends* give each other nicknames-“

“Neither of you are my fucking *friend*, ” Tommy interrupts sharply, the smile that had been growing unbidden twisting into a snarl of disgust. “*Wilbur* is my friend.”

Tubbo’s blue eyes meets his beneath a fringe of brown curls, gaze unreadable even as a smile plays on his lips. “You can have more than one friend, big man.”

“I only need Wilbur,” Tommy growls as he straightens out. “So screw yo-“

Techno flicks water into his face.

“Chill out,” the man grunts as Tommy twists indignantly towards him. “No one is stealing you away from Wil.” The tap is shut off, hands wiped roughly on the side of his pants. “I swear it’s like herding *cats*.”

“Enderchest would *never*-“

“Not your cats, Ranboo,” Techno interrupts with a pinch of the bridge of his nose. “I know Enderchest and Enderpearl are both very well behaved.”

“Like dogs,” Tubbo nods. “Enderchest even knows how to play dead.”

“She only does that because you keep trying to take her on walks.” Ranboo flicks a dubious look at the much shorter boy. “On a *leash*.”

“*Enderpearl* likes our walks.”

“Mmhmm, that’s why you have to drag her scratching and yowling out the front door.”

Tommy scowls, shoving his hands back into the bowl to drag the pie crust out and dump it roughly into a waiting tray, desperate to ignore the banter between the two teens who clearly know each other, who have a history, who clearly don’t need Tommy to intrude in their shitty life and shitty apartment with their two shitty cats and-

Fuck, all he can think about is *Dream*.

Dream who’d buy little cans of tuna to keep in one of the pouches around his waist and crouch down to feed the stray cats around their apartment, his voice falling into that ridiculous crooning sound as they stroked up against his scarred palm, his mouth curling soft, green eyes bright, hoodie askew on the top of his head and locks of dark blond hair fluffing out.

Dream who spends a week on bedrest because he’d inhaled too much smoke, the gasmask smushed over the nose of a fat ginger cat that buries claws deep into his hoodie and leaves the sleeves half-shredded, yowling loud and dissatisfied when it was carried away.

There’s a rustle, Techno bending to peer over his shoulder, mouth angling close to his ear.

“You like them,” he murmurs knowingly, his breath warm.

“The fuck I do,” Tommy hisses as he roughly flattens the crust out. “They’re *idiots* and I want nothing to do with them.”

-

“What’cha doing, bossman?”

The pies are done, crowding up in the oven, and Tommy halts with his hand clenched tight around the round brass handle of a tall white wooden door.

He turns his head, just enough to peer at Tubbo who looks casually relaxed, chin tilted up and fringe brushed aside to leave his eyes on full display, arms crossed and shoulder propped against the wall.

The green checkered button-up falls loose on his body and Tommy very deliberately does not look at the small brown horns that folds back in the beginning of a curve above soft floppy ears covered in fur a shade lighter than his hair.

Ram hybrid. Tommy has only met one before Tubbo and there's something amusing about the tall, sharply dressed Schlatt being measured up against this short messy haired boy who has one button crookedly done, leaving the hem too long on one side.

A soft *meow* is followed by a light pawing at the wood and Tommy flushes.

"You know, if you wanted to meet them, all you had to do was ask." Tubbo offers him a smile and it's different, somehow, his eyes clearer where they linger on Tommy with consideration. "Ranboo dotes on them enough that they're practically our children. He even made them their own stockings for Christmas."

Tubbo takes a step towards him and Tommy takes a measured one back, letting his fingers slide off the handle and disappear into the pocket of his jeans.

"He said-" Tommy halts, mouth thinning. "*Ranboob*, he called you his *future husband*."

"Platonic," Tubbo grins, twisting the handle and nudging the door open with a meaningful tilt of his head before he slipped inside. "Did you know married couples get tax benefits?" he calls from inside.

Tommy peers down the corridor, to the kitchen where Phil and Techno had fallen into a deep conversation while Ranboo had been stuck on pie watching duty, and he only hesitates for a moment before he followed the shorter boy, closing the door shut behind him.

His eyes zeroes on the two shadows lounging on the bed, one pair of eyes bright yellow, the other gleaming green.

"This is Enderpearl-" Tubbo reaches out to scoop up the green eyed cat that immediately starts purring, loudly, like a small machine as it nudges a small nose up against the boy's chin. "She likes me, but she also likes most people." He turns his head, rubbing softly against the top of her head. "Enderchest is a bit more choosey."

A black tail curls through the air, yellow eyes regarding him with a small twitching black nose as it sniffed the air.

"Hello," Tommy breathes as he hunches down in an echo of his mentor. "Hi there gorgeous," he croons as he extends a hand out, keeping his palm up as its ear flicks. "Look at you, you're not choosey, you just have taste, right, girl?" His mouth curls as she slowly pushes up, stretching out with a wide dismissive yawn that shows off all needle-sharp teeth. "You're quite the hunter, aren't you? I bet all the mice in the neighborhood fear you."

“She’s actually not allowed outside unless she’s leashed.” Tubbo tilts his head as Enderchest threads closer, ignoring Tommy’s hand and instead tilting her head to stroke up against his cheek with a soft squeak. “Huh.”

Tommy rumbles a soft noise back, grinning as she turned inquisitively with large lamp like eyes, tiny nose bumping up against the skin beneath his eye.

“This is betrayal,” Tubbo huffs as he shifts Enderpearl before sinking down on the bed as Tommy strokes a hand down Enderchest’s back before angling his fingers and scratch up beneath her chin to an answering rumbling purr. “You know, Ranboo is going to apologize to you and it’s up to you what you do with it.” Tubbo sprawls back on the dark green covers, head turning with a grin at him. “But I hope you’ll accept it.”

“*Why?*” Tommy demands warily.

“You’re funny, when you’re not being all prickly.” Tubbo’s gaze is clear and bright with the spread of his grin. “And we hybrids have to stick together, right?”

Tommy’s head snaps up, eyes wide when they settle on the other, fingers frozen in the black fur.

“What?” he chokes out. “I’m not-“

“Tommy!”

He jerks, craning around with his heart pounding loud in his chest, all too aware of Tubbo watching him quietly from the bed as he scrambles up, ignoring Enderchest’s displeased *meow* as his fingers curls tight around the knob.

“I won’t tell anyone,” Tubbo says, palm stroking down Enderpearl’s back.

“There is nothing *to* tell,” Tommy growls, twisting the knob and dragging the door firmly shut behind him, breathing out harshly. “I’m not a hybrid,” he mutters, dragging a hand through his hair, fingers folding tight with a rough tug. “Why is everyone so fucking weird around here?” he hisses in frustration.

“Tommy?” Phil angles around the corner, a brow raised, and Tommy stills guiltily. “There you are.”

“Yeah,” he grunts, slouching with his hands stuffed deep into his pockets. “We leaving soon?”

“Just giving the pies a moment to cool,” Phil agrees, blue eyes flicking momentarily behind him before settling back on him, crinkling with crowfeet at the corner. “Don’t tell him I said anything but Techno is pretty excited to show you how to make potatoes.”

“Right,” Tommy breathes, grimacing as he scrubbed a hand over the side of his face. “Right-um, now?”

“We have the time.” Phil tilts his head. “Everything alright there, mate?”

“Just fine-fucking-dandy,” Tommy bites out.

-

Tommy furrows his brows, staring dubiously at the potatoes on his plate as Techno takes a bite out of one still hot enough that it’s steaming.

“It’s that easy?” he asks finally.

“It’s that easy,” Techno grunts, taking another big chunk. “You can microwave them as well, just make sure to poke holes in them first or they’re gonna explode.”

“I don’t have a microwave.”

“You’re a tragedy,” the man informs him. “You should take Ranboo’s, he’s got at least two more stored away.”

“He does?” Tommy eyes the microwave in question. “*Why?*”

“Tubbo keeps picking them apart, I think.” Techno pops the last bit of potato into his mouth, mouth curling with satisfaction, lower canines pushing at his lips. Or *tusks*, Tommy supposes are the correct word for them, though they look nothing like the curling sharp ones of the Blood God that gleams with the gold that circles them. “He’s savvy with technology, or at least that’s the excuse he makes.”

“*Weird*,” Tommy says with feeling before he reaches forward to yank the cord out. “I’m hiding it in your jacket.”

“You do that,” Techno acknowledges, grabbing for a second potato.

“I’m telling Wilbur you’re encouraging me to do crime.”

Tommy hefts the microwave beneath his arm, turning around and pausing as he makes eye contact with Phil who raises one and then two brows.

“*Phil*, your son is encouraging me to do crime.”

“I can see that,” Phil muses, blue eyes glittering with humor as they flicker to Techno. “Starting them young now?”

“Eh, it’s all Wil’s influence,” Techno shrugs, leaning back against the countertop as Tommy inches his way past Phil. “What is that thing he calls himself? *A dirty crime boy?*”

“He signs his contracts with it as well,” Phil snorts, blue eyes tracking Tommy as he dodges out of the kitchen.

“It’s a wonder we get anything done.”

-

Tommy is aware of the way Ranboo's gaze tracks him but he pretends not to, sticking himself close to Techno's side with a bowl of cooling potatoes cradled in the crook of his arm and pie balanced on an open palm.

Techno hefts his large square jacket beneath his arm and Ranboo pauses, staring at it.

"Is that--"

"My jacket," Techno agrees, mouth curling sharp with teeth and eyes glimmering. "Gotta stay warm, you know."

Ranboo stares for a moment longer and then coughs, turning away. "Right."

Tubbo rounds the corner from the bedroom, Enderpearl hanging from arms wrapped around her chest, lower body swaying with the motion as she purrs loudly, eyes lidded. "You leaving then?"

"Promised Wil to have the child home at eight," Techno shrugs.

"Not a child," Tommy snaps grumpily, drawing the bowl closer with a scowl.

"You're the youngest here." Techno slides him a look. "Ranboo and Tubbo are seventeen and they're both, decidedly, children."

"Not for long." Tubbo's grin is sharp as he hefts Enderpearl further up into his arms, his chin pressing down against the top of her head. "We'll be eighteen before you know it."

"I can't wait." Techno looks entirely unenthused by the prospect. "Really."

"I'll be home a bit later," Phil offers with a smile at them both, tucking one hand into the pocket of his jeans where he's leaning against the door opening to the kitchen. "Niki said she'd be back in thirty or so."

Techno grunts in acknowledgement, turning and nudging Tommy towards the door.

"Bye Tommy." Tubbo shifts to wave one paw after him. "Until we meet again."

"No thank you," Tommy breathes, kicking the door shut behind them both and cutting Ranboo off rudely.

He tries not to feel guilty about it as Techno slides him a look.

-

"So, you had a good day?"

Wilbur sits with his cheek smushed against his open palm, elbow on table and glasses askew on his nose, brown eyes regarding him a wary kind of curiosity.

The band aids on his hand had been traded out for blue ones with orcas after each finger had been carefully inspected and cleaned.

Tommy tries not to linger on the irony of the scars that span across his body that had received less fuss than his picked nailbeds.

“It was okay,” Tommy huffs.

I’d rather have been with you, he thinks but does not say as he swings his leg absently beneath the table, the other tucked beneath his thigh on the chair. *I missed you*.

“I made the pie for you,” Tommy blurts out before he wrinkles his nose. “Techno tried to make me share but I refused.”

“Ah.” Wilbur looks down at the pie on his plate, golden brown crust with blueberries spilling down the sides, glistening with sugar. “I take it he’s the one who told you I like blueberries as well?”

“Yeah-huh,” Tommy says as he watches the other carefully.

“I see,” Wilbur says as he carefully lifts the delicate silver spoon and slides it through the very tip of the slice, scooping up a generous helping with a strange look. “I’ll have to make sure to *thank him* later.”

Tommy cocks his head but he’s distracted as Wilbur opens his mouth and abruptly clamps down on the spoon, yanking it out, palm slamming down against the table as he straightened out in his seat.

“It’s good,” Wilbur says thickly, a hand settling over his mouth with a watery look. “The best blueberry pie I’ve ever had,” he swears.

A tremble runs through his hand as he stabs the spoon down, piling it high.

“... You don’t really *love* blueberries, do you?”

“No, I *do*,” Wilbur denies, biting down, teeth scraping against the spoon as he pulled it out. “They’re my *favorites*.”

“You don’t *have* to eat it.”

Wilbur shakes his head, one arm curling protectively around the plate as he hunched over it. “I love blueberries,” he says, almost feverishly, as if saying it aloud would somehow make it true. “And *you* made it for me.”

“Wilbur-“ Another spoon disappears into his friend’s mouth and Tommy watches as he drastically pales, knuckles white and tense around the metal. “I can just make you another pie.”

Tommy slumps forward, arms crossing on the table and mouth pressing against them to hide the ridiculous tugging of his lips as the other paused, processing the offer.

“Toffee and banana?” Wilbur asks hopefully with a croak.

“That’s a thing?” Tommy furrows his brow. “Sure, whatever, your pick.”

“Oh thank *fuck*.” The spoon clutters to the plate and Wilbur drags his palm over his pale face, fingers disappearing into the mess of his fringe. “No offense-“

“I’m not eating that,” Tommy interrupts, slumping deeper. “Feel free to do whatever with it.”

Wilbur pauses, his head tipping to the side, eyes sliding to settle on the tin foiled blueberry pie on the kitchen counter.

There’s a moment of silence.

“I’ll take care of it,” Wilbur says with a stretch of his lips. “Gotta make sure it doesn’t go to waste when you worked so hard on it, after all.”

“Salute the asshole from me,” Tommy snorts, stretching his arms out across the table with a roll of his back and a tired sigh as he dropped his forehead down against the wood. “Fucking deserve it for making me socialize.”

“Oh the *villainy* of it all,” Wilbur grins and fingers dip into the mess of his hair, scratching against his scalp. “Don’t worry, Toms,” his friend murmurs, voice soft and sweet like honey as Tommy lets his eyes slide shut as nails drag up his neck and twists the growing strands at his nape into a little tail with a tug. “I’ll avenge you.”

-

There’s something strangely intimate about being trusted with someone’s food.

Tommy hadn’t really thought about beyond the necessity of survival. He ate, he lived, he breathed – it was the lifeblood of the streets, the driving force beyond scrabbling desperation and a tumble into situations far above his head.

He’d broken into houses for food, had dug through trash, had curled around the rare find of a half-eaten pizza with desperation and stubborn refusal to give up something he’d found entirely on his own.

He’d paid for it, in bruises dark against his flesh, nose broken and dripping blood, barely able to see out from swollen eyes as he sniffled miserably and dragged a piece up, letting it dangle enticingly in front of him before he bit down hard with wetness prickling at his eyes as flavours burst against his tongue.

It hadn’t been fully cold, he remembers that, and remembers the way the cheese hadn’t been the strange crusty hardness he thought it was supposed to be but rather soft and dragging out in a short string that he chased after to chomp down on with a satisfied spread of his lips.

It was a short-lived kind of win that had set him back for days, his stomach cramping violently at too much heavy food, most of it ending up in chunky splashes against the pavement as he stumbled for safety, convinced he was dying, that it had been poisoned, that-

He never ends up finishing it, paranoia leaving it buried deep in a trash bin as he spent a night shivering and sweating, waking several times to throw up, choking and spluttering on acid in the cold dark night before flopping back to stare up at the stars high up above him.

It had been years before he had pizza again, eleven and scowling suspiciously at the box Dream had brought home with a bottle of coca cola tucked beneath his arm.

“This much?” Wilbur demands of him, shoving a measuring cup into his face with a strange intensity.

“Into that-“ Tommy nudges the bowl closer to him. “And then you can dice andd mush the bananas.”

Wilbur drops the measuring cup and all into the bowl before making a hurried turn around, grabbing triumphantly for the entire batch of bananas as Tommy fished it up and shook it out, slipping it discreetly into the dishwasher with a kick of his heel to close it shut.

“Tech never trusts me to do any of the baking,” Wilbur confides as he shoves the bag of flour back with a flourished sweep of his arm and placed the fruit down on the cutting board. “Or cooking. Or anything related to food really.”

He grabs both ends of a banana and cracks it in half against his knee before setting to peel both parts.

Tommy stares at him, hair messy, flour prints on at least five places despite having only measured a single cup, eyes bright and a cheerful tune catching from a hum into higher notes and half-caught lyrics as another banana was grabbed, process repeated.

They really don’t need nine bananas for a single pie. *Probably.*

“Where do you keep the toffee?” he asks, folding his sleeve up from the drooping slouch over his hands to leave them at the edge of his wrist before shoving his hand into the bowl with the ingredients for the crust, ignoring the mechanical whisk entirely.

“Oh-“ Wilbur makes a turn and Tommy reaches out to snatch the last two bananas and tuck them away. “They should be right-“ The man yanks one of the cupboards above the fridge open, hand disappearing to paw roughly inside with a focused crease of his brows before his eyes brightened triumphantly. “Here!”

He pulls out a package of toffee colas and- the recipe *said* they needed some caramelized shit or whatever but Tommy decides that it’s probably *fine*.

They do some arguing about the best way to layer the top layer once everything was in order, Wilbur strongly wanting a neat web, Tommy unable to resist flick little uneven stripes half-hazardly over the man’s careful work as he lingered on the side.

It escalates when Wilbur grabs the bag of flour, turns, and cheerfully dumps it over Tommy’s head only to be tackled a flat second later with Tommy doing his level best to rub as much of it onto him as possible amidst loud yelps and protests.

“Really?” Techno groans when he stops to peer into the kitchen, book tucked beneath his arm. “Can you at least be disasters in silence? I’m trying to *read*.”

Wilbur takes one look at him and dives for the blueberry pie on the table.

-

“Sometimes,” Techno says very, very calmly as he drags a hand over his face, palm coming back heavy with a scooping of half-mushed blueberries. “I question who, between us, *really* is the older one.”

Wilbur stands tall, admiring his handiwork with a spread of his palms and an innocent smile.

“I know how much you love blueberries, Tech,” Wilbur says, all saccharine teasing. “There must have been some sort of misunderstanding today, I was just clearing it up.”

Tommy flicks his gaze between them with a morbid kind of curiosity, slowly straightening up behind Wilbur as he zeroes on Techno, waiting to see what he’d do-

Blueberries splatter against Wilbur’s already flour covered form, dark against the white, Wilbur already moving, and Tommy lurches forward, startled when they went down in a scrabbling of long limbs, rolling over the kitchen floor and forcing him to dance back to avoid a swipe for his ankles-

-

“You fuckers-!” Tommy yelps as Techno yanks him back with a rough tug of his hoodie, Wilbur grinning as he scooped up a large handful of left-over mashed bananas, limbs pinning him in place and baring his neck with clear intention as Tommy struggled fruitlessly. “You *motherfuckers*- I’m gonna fucking *murder* you-“

-

There’s flour dusting up all possible surfaces, food mush smeared in patterns and prints on the floor and up cupboards and both fridge and freezer, two blue handprints wrapping around the closest table chairs and a strange splatter of red and browning banana mush in the midst of the ceiling.

“I’m not helping,” Tommy snorts tiredly, sprawled out in the midst of the mess the kitchen had turned into, arm folded back to half-heartedly paw out the mashed banana and something that looked suspiciously like strawberry jam lumping with the flour. He flicks it away with a grimace. “You fuckers can fix your own mess.”

Wilbur stretches a palm out and smears a hearty spread of blueberries down his cheek. “Gremlin.”

Techno swipes his tongue up his thumb, nose wrinkling. “Waste of a good pie,” he grunts as Wilbur and Tommy both stares at him.

Wilbur wheezes out a half-maniac laugh, rolling over to bury his face into Tommy's belly as his shoulder shook. "Fuck you, Techno," he chokes out. "I ate, like, half a bit of that fucking pie."

"You hate blueberries."

"I know," Wilbur laughs, light and airy where it rings out. "I fucking *know*."

"Idiot," Techno huffs but when Tommy peers up at him his eyes are warm, more brown than red where they linger on his brother. "You could have just told him."

-

Tommy has always thought of his home as being with Dream.

"*No matter what happens,*" Dream had said, clapping his shoulder as Tommy peered suspiciously into the apartment, fourteen-years-old and newly graduated into the spot of being a Hero, "*you can always come back to my place in the tower.*"

"*It's a bit empty, innit?*" Tommy has responded, wrinkling his nose at the bare white walls.

"*It's all yours to decorate as you want,*" Dream had leant back against the door frame, at ease, his face bare and eyes a bright shade of green. "*You're a Hero now and old enough to deserve a place to call your own.*"

Tommy hadn't commented on it. Hadn't said that *it would never be home without you in it* but he'd thought it. Loudly. With a long skeptical look at his mentor as he swept inside, clearly impatient to show him around.

Dream hadn't been wrong, ultimately. It *was* nice to get away, occasionally. To dodge out and away from his responsibilities as Red Chaos and sprawl out in his very own bed and just *breathe*, but that was all he'd allowed it to be.

A pause after an argument with Dream that usually ended with his mentor dropping in through his bedroom window and flop down beside him, or drop down at the very edge, sometimes with an apology, sometimes just to offer a shoulder for Tommy to drag himself up against and collapse against as his mentor set tense and silent, wrapped in his own thoughts and regrets.

Both of them were stubborn, keen to buttheads, but ultimately unwilling to let it get between each other.

"*I'm proud of you,*" Dream tells him one such evening, his breathing quiet in the dark as Tommy carefully inches closer. "*I want you to know that remains the same, no matter what I or anyone else says.*"

I'm here, Tommy would think with the press of his shoulder against his mentor's. *I'm not going anywhere.*

The apartment had been his for two years but he'd never bothered to do much with it and Dream had never commented on it, hadn't said anything about the bucket of paint that appears in Tommy's hallway only to get shoved into a cupboard and never used.

-

He wonders what it is about Wilbur that makes him want to let him in, to make changes he himself had never dared to do.

-

"Come on," Wilbur says that evening, after Tommy has brushed his teeth and changed into the red long-sleeved sweater and dark blue sweatpants the other lends him with a ruffle of his hair and a smile.

Both articles of clothes are clearly well-worn and soft against his skin and he doesn't miss the glimmer that brightens Wilbur's eyes when he sees him in them.

He stands at the opening to his room, door open and inviting.

It had taken them nearly two hours of cleaning to get the kitchen into some semblance of order and Tommy had been thoroughly bribed with the promise of a midnight pizza that had been delivered in brown flat boxes, still steaming hot.

He'd burrowed down against Wilbur on the couch, a movie running on the screen, pieces traded between them as Tommy chugged his cola and Techno and Wilbur both split a bottle of red wine in ridiculous cartoon patterned cups with strange square like creatures on them.

Wilbur had very ceremoniously dumped the one with pigs in front of Techno, claiming one with blue sheeps for himself, and leaving Tommy with one that had little square ghost-like creatures.

"There are ones with cows too," Wilbur had grinned. "They're your favourite, right? I'll pick one up next time."

They'd split the pie that had, somehow, miraculously, survived, for desert. Toffee melted in odd little pools of soft brown amidst the mushy yellow of the banana.

Wilbur had managed nearly a third of the pie all on his own and he'd tucked the last away under foil and a bright blue sticker with *WILBUR'S* slapped on top of it in the fridge.

Tommy only hesitates for a single beat of his heart before he grins, ducking beneath Wilbur's arm and launching forward to sprawl out obnoxiously on top of the blue covers.

The fish tank is large against the wall, the light inside in casting a shimmering light over the ceiling as the large fish inside of it twists around, trailing lazily through the water with round black eyes. On the opposite side bookcases with knick-knacks and jars filled with different kinds of sand crowds together, the occasional book slanting from where it had hastily been shoved in place.

There's a poster of a band above the bedside table and beside it a guitar is placed carefully on a stand.

"Play me something," Tommy requests as he twists around, on his back and starting up at the ceiling as Wilbur shrugs out of his sweater to leave him in a well-worn band shirt, the print faded and peeling against a background of navy blue.

"Oh? The child wants a lullaby?" Wilbur teases, bending to hoist the guitar up into his arms without protest before he stepped back, sinking down on the edge of the bed with a strumming of sound. "Got any requests?"

Tommy shakes his head, scooting closer and wrapping himself around a pillow, tucking his chin against the top of it. "Anything," he says.

"Alright." Wilbur closes his eyes, picking at the strings thoughtfully before his fingers still. "I call this one *La Jolla*."

Soft chords picks up and fills the room to settle in his heart, and Tommy closes his eyes, listening as Wilbur's voice singing joins quiet and gentle in the night.

A world with you in it, he thinks as he allows Wilbur's voice to lull him to sleep, *is worth protecting*.

-

"If you don't like it," Wilbur's voice brushes anxious and tense against his ear as he's shuffled inside, palms spread flat over his eyes. "We'll return it to it was before, alright? So you gotta be honest with me, Toms."

"I promise."

Tommy's back bumps against Wilbur's chest when they come to a halt, ribs expanding with a long drawn breath and then-

The hands were sliding off, the bright light of his room making him blink and-

He chokes on a laugh, grin spreading wide over his face as he cranes his head around. "Wilbur."

"Yeah?" the man's voice rises high.

"You're an absolute fucking *dork*," Tommy informs him seriously, unable to tear his eyes away from the walls and the colours that crams together bright and ridiculous because *fuck-*

Animals of all sorts crowds on his walls, misshapen and childish with their long and short necks, large eyes and small lopsided dots in the ducks that swims in a large pond-

Brown blobs with white spots crowds on another wall, *cows*, a long-necked creature with thin legs and thick strong thighs that maybe, kindly, could be compared to the broad tall horse that

had breathed warm against his palm with a heavy expanding of its chest in the paddock
Techno had brought him out to.

A bushy tailed fox splashes black socked paws through a riverbank, a too large salmon
twisting up with a splatter of water, a pink sharp eared pig seated on the shore with a crow
spreading its wings broadly where it sits and-

Everywhere he looks there's something new, some surprisingly accurate, others just broad
swipes of a thick paintbrush-

"That's you." Wilbur points to the last wall, above his bed, where tall pines rises up, clearly
an echo of Pogtopia with the spreading of white and blue mixed and twisted to make the ice
of the wild and- there's a scruffy looking raccoon seated right in the middle, tail striped and
wrapped around a brown wolf with little springy curls to make a small fringe. "You and me."

"Why a wolf?" Tommy fumbles out as he drinks the sight of them, the clear care in the small
strokes that had brought bright blue eyes against a mask of black.

"I've always thought of myself as something of a lone wolf." The twist of Wilbur's mouth is
wry, the look in his eyes distant as he takes a step deeper into the room, his shoulder brushing
against Tommy's. "But you're making me reconsider a lot of things, you know?"

The wolf sits proudly beside the raccoon, trench coat painted to rest on its shoulders, its
brown eyes warm.

"No matter what happens," Wilbur says, arm wrapping around his shoulder and pulling his
closer, "I want you to know you're not alone, alright? You've got me now and I wanted- well,
I wanted to make something that would remind you of that."

And- there's something thick in Tommy's chest, frail and new and heavy where it wraps
around his heart but also impossibly warm.

"There's something else-" Wilbur coughs and when Tommy peers up at him there's pink
spreading soft over his cheeks. "But you're not allowed to listen to it until I've left."

"Why?" he breathes and Wilbur pauses, craning to peer down at him.

"You'll understand when you hear it," Wilbur grins, soft and warm and teasing with the way
lines creases in his face. "But, just to make sure- you like it?"

Tommy doesn't know how to put the feelings inside of him into words but he tugs himself
out of Wilbur's grasp, letting the man's arm slide back against his side, meeting brown eyes
that watches him with a soft kind of look that Tommy doesn't understand beneath something
vulnerable.

Wilbur with his ridiculous brown curly fringe, round dorky glasses and another ridiculously
soft looking sweater that slants lopsided on his shoulder.

Stupid, civilian Wilbur who pokes and prods and teases and who wants Tommy despite his
biting anger and hurts that claws dark and thick inside of him.

Tommy rocks back and then he lurches forward, wrapping his arm solidly around the other's neck and pulling him down as he presses up on his toes to make up for the inches of height that separates them.

"I love it," Tommy wrestles out, something raw and thick in his throat. "And I don't say that lightly so- so you better be fucking proud, alright?" He swallows. "I'm happy, I really am."

An arm, and then two, wraps gently around him in return and he squeezes his eyes shut as Wilbur breathes out a soft sigh into his ear.

"I'm glad," his friend tells him, drawing him closer and practically folding around him as Tommy burrows impossibly closer, fingers sinking deep into the sweater of the man, desperate to hold on for just a little bit longer.

-

"It will be just you and me now. Dream and Red Chaos. There's no turning back after today."

Tommy draws a sharp breath, nodding as he shakes off the last clinging nervousness, checking one last time to make sure the mask was firmly in place.

"No turning back," he echoes, stepping up to where his mentor waits, the man's smile briefly visible beneath the edge of his mask before it slid properly in place.

Chapter End Notes

Ngl, I've been a bit nervous about the whole room reveal but I hope you guys like it? I'm officially wiping my hands off overthinking it and dumping it on you either way.

I've been thinking about this as kinda the first arc of Hush Now and we're gonna be folding over to the second one with the next chapter so strap in tight my guys.

On that note I'm gonna be away all day tomorrow bcs I'm on vacation and all and I really wanted to get this up before that. So if you see any spelling mistakes pls ignore, I'll get to them properly later. This chapter is 6k heavy and I can only read it through so many times pls.

Much love from me to you, I hope you're all having a wonderful day/night wherever you are :)

-

We. Have so much fanart. Dudes. I reblog everything on my tumblr [corpse-art](#) so feel free to swing by there :) I also post updates and stuff. Good vibes.

Thank you all so so much. It's absolutely fucking amazing to see it and it makes me very, very happy.

(If I link your art and you want, for whatever reason, for me to remove or change anything just let me know, yeah?)

On that note - ART:

[different meals, different people by scytheart](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[Red Chaos design by lun-ar-tra-sh](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[The Blood God by undefinedscream](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[Road Trip by owlwinter8 for chapter 12](#) (also Philza approved)

[Red Chaos concept art by NYMIS](#)

[A Conversation by panddraw for chapter 8](#)

[Photo Taken Seconds Before Disaster by owlwinter8 for chapter 10](#)

[An encounter with the angel of death for chapter 2 by owlwinter8](#)

[Tommy doesn't look like a civilian by owlwinter8 for chapter 9](#)

[You look like a Tommy to me by hiblue for chapter 9](#)

[Red Chaos concept art by void-ant](#)

[Tommy in Dream vs Wilbur hoodie by Eu_nyx for chapter 9](#)

[Cooking with the angel of death for chapter 2 by scytheart](#)

[I make threats not promises Tommyinnit by 100-reasons-sbi](#)

[Tommy and the Blood God by jellyswissroll for chapter 1](#)

[Are we friends Wilbur by owlwinter8 for chapter 3](#)

[Learning to cook by owlwinter8 for chapter 2](#)

[You Got Me a Christmas Present by lilacadaisy for chapter 3](#)

[THIS IS OUR POGTOPIA by hiblue for chapter 4](#)

[Red Chaos by fridges](#)

Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"You want Tuesday off?" Sam turns fully towards him, the broom he'd been using placed aside to rest against the nearest table. "Is there a particular reason as to why you're suddenly requesting it?"

"I'm meeting up with someone," Tommy shrugs, biting back the instinctive response of *it's none of your fucking business* as he scrubs down hard against a coffee stain that had seeped deep into the wood.

The small café is silent, Fran deep asleep behind the counter, the dim familiar lighting casting its low glow upon them, chair and tables odd and mismatched where they span out around them.

Sam stands tall, his shoulders broad, green hair messily swept aside, and it's one of those days where a simple black mask spans over Sam's mouth, a hand rising to scratch two fingers against the side of his chin.

"I see no reason you can't have the day off," Sam answers finally, the lines of his face creasing with a smile. "I'm glad, it looks like you're really looking forward to seeing them."

Tommy thinks of the message on the screen of his phone, the time, eight o'clock sharp to meet with Royal, and then after-

"Yeah," he breathes, glancing up and out at the window where he can see the smile on his face reflected back at him. "It's about time, really."

-

Tommy steps into his bedroom where he crouches down, reaching far beneath his bed before his fingers brushes cardboard and he grabs it, dragging it out with a rough sound against floorboards.

He draws a breath, lets it out, folding down crisscross before gently opening it up.

His red hoodie lies folded on top and he pulls it out, placing it carefully aside.

He pulls his shirt roughly over his head and discards it aside, grabbing the thin but warm black undergear armour he'd picked up from a sports store and pulling it on.

It's not made for protection against anything but the cold weather but it's better than *nothing* and he tugs at the long sleeves, slipping his thumb through the hole at the end, bracelet firmly covered from sight where it stretches out securely over the back of his hands.

The utility belt is all black pouches with zippers, sturdy, something he'd found while browsing down the aisle of a fishing store. He'd stocked two of them with his standard first gear kit, slipping a needle and thread down gently beside two rolls of thick white bandages.

A hunting knife gets strapped to his thigh, plainly in sight, another disappearing into the rigging he'd made on the inside of the boots he'd picked up second hand, leather well worn as he pulls them on and knots them tight with a firm tug.

He straps the vambraces in place, black and picked up from another sports store, made to protect against the snap of the string in archery. They're black, two metal poles folded into the fabric, protecting the soft skin on the inside of his wrists.

He reaches for his hoodie, dragging it into his lap, staring down at the broad green stretch of the smile he'd painted on it, the eyes slanting in two lopsided x's instead of the round black dots of his mentor's signature look.

Different, yet alike enough to make the message clear.

He pulls it roughly over his head, letting the warm well-worn fabric pool down, tugging it in place and adjusting the high collar of the black shirt beneath it.

Fingerless gloves, beanie tugged down and hair shoved roughly into it, red goggles settling in place over his eyes, hoodie drawn up-

He pauses, hand over his mask, reaching inside gently to scoop it out, thumbs pressing down against the surface of it.

He twists it around, sliding down the small secret apartment, staring at the two capsules that rests innocently inside.

Tommy lets it click back in place before he lifts it up, pressing it over his mouth and nose, sealing tight against his skin with a press of his thumb with something close to relief coiling through his veins as his eyes slides shut, breathing in with a rough expanding of his ribs.

He presses up from the floor, steps quiet as he approaches his wardrobe, opening the doors wide and reaching inside, sliding the hidden back aside and grasping for the two short poles and strap he'd made for them, sliding it over his shoulder and securing it around his midriff with a *click* and tug.

"We don't kill!" He reaches back, grasping the escrima sticks tight and pulling them out, handles wrapped in leather, smooth and dulled, surprisingly heavy where they settle in his palms. *"That's your first rule! Or did you forget?"*

"I didn't forget," he tells the silence of his apartment, eyes sliding to rest on the two discs Wilbur had left him beside an old record player, fingers folding tight. "You better have one real fucking good explanation, Dream."

Las Nevadas is located almost two hours from his apartment and Tommy isn't about to take the public transportation decked out in full Hero gear.

He's not stupid, thank you *very* fucking much.

He drags a black jacket over his hoodie, bought on sale and thick enough that his escrimas are properly out of sight, and drags the zipper up – pausing.

Tommy backtracks into his apartment, into his bedroom and opens his wardrobe, digging out the lime green scarf he'd knitted for Dream, thumbs dragging over the small webbed net of thread.

He wraps it determinedly around his neck, letting it settle high up to cover his mask unless someone looked too close.

He catches sight of Clementine when he passes by his kitchen and presses his fingers down to check her soil – satisfied to find it still damp.

“Guard the house for me, alright Clementine?” Tommy carries her gently into his bedroom, placing her down on his bedside table and turning her leaves so they were facing towards the window to catch the morning light. “I'll be back before you know it.”

Small, bright green leaves gets a small pat and he casts a last glance at the painting on the wall – at the raccoon and wolf side by side amidst ice and trees.

“I'll be back,” he promises, ducking out and closing the door gently shut behind him.

-

He twists the wires together, car rumbling to life, and he grins before he ducks out from beneath the panel, settling properly in place and adjusting the seat with a drag and click.

He adjusts the side mirrors, the rearview mirror, mentally tallies through all the steps with a press of the clutch pedal and a rough shift of the gear stick before he pauses.

He reaches out, grabbing for the seatbelt and clicking it in place.

“Safety first,” he tells no one in particular, something heavy in his chest that he shoves down as he twists the wheel.

-

The car is expensive, rumbling low and smooth as he presses down on the gas pedal, inching up the speed on the highway, lights flashing past him as he weaves in and out between the other cars.

He floors it to pick up past an idiot that had been hanging too close at his tail, leaving them in the dust with window rolled down and middle-finger stuck out with a grin, blue eyes bright when he catches sight of himself in the rearview mirror, goggles pushed up to his forehead.

The heart of L'Manberg towers up and he takes a left in a split of the road, away from the large spiraling Hero tower that reaches up to the heavens and down a dark tunnel with blue lights patterning down the sides, the signs hanging from the ceiling branding his destination clear.

WELCOME TO LAS NEVADAS

-

It takes him a bit to find a good spot to park the car, close enough that he can clearly see the strobe lights that flashes in the sky above the casino as he steps out onto the pavement.

It stands out inside towering walls that wraps around the broad stretch of ground that belonged to Jester, white and finely detailed, towering pillars stretching up and the entrance guarded by a large towering statue wrapped entirely in gold.

Everyone and their child knew about the *Golden Man of Las Nevadas*. The supposed deity that had chosen its home with the golden spread flooring, his reach stretching in the webbed net of a dome that crowned the inside.

Cameras weren't allowed inside the casino but Tommy had read enough descriptions of the inside of it to at least have an idea of what awaited him down long spiralling corridors and the hotel with its untouched beds.

The sleepless walls of Las Nevadas.

Tommy knows very well that Jester's powers have nothing to do with preventing people from *sleeping* of all fucking things- anything sleep related was firmly in George's territory- but there's a sense of wonder and mystery that wraps around the casino.

He breathes out, sliding his phone out of his pocket and checking the time.

-

Tommy hoists himself up the last bit of the roof, twisting and dropping himself down on the edge, letting his boots hit the ground with a *thud*.

"Hello again, Red."

Royal stands tall, plateau booted feet, red cloak fluttering in the wind as the golden mask of a lioness turns towards him.

"Royal," Tommy acknowledges, voice filtering metallic in the air, far up on a building where the wind blows cold but at least there's no snowfall. "Your contact--"

"Knows to expect you," Royal interrupts, her voice ringing smooth in the air, blue eyes regarding him with a keen sort of interest. "I was wondering if you were going to turn up in your old Hero gear or not."

“Can’t let the world think Red Chaos is gone,” Tommy huffs, straightening out from his crouch and settling his shoulders straight as he turns his head, peering down towards Las Nevadas. “Any news on Dream?”

“He’s still keeping largely to himself,” Royal answers after a moment, snow crunching as she stepped up on the ledge to stand beside him, her golden mask gleaming with the bared snarl of the lioness. “There are rumours,” she says in an undertone as Tommy tilts his head towards her, “that Schlatt and Dream has been caught talking.”

“Schlatt?” Tommy echoes, jaw clenching. “Why the hell-“

“I don’t know,” Royal interrupts, the unruly mess of her hair whipping in a sharp gust of air. “I can only tell you what’s being said in the tower. Dream doesn’t let anyone come near his floor and he hasn’t been down on any of the communal ones.”

“Fuck,” Tommy breathes with feeling, hand curling to tug at the strings of his hoodie.
“*Fuck.*”

“I could try to slip him a message,” Royal offers, meeting his gaze steadily through the red tinted visor. “I can’t promise anything-“

“Maybe.” Tommy releases the strings. “I’m hoping that he’ll reach out to me,” he admits wryly, twisting to show the smile on his back. “What do you think? Is it enough of a statement?”

Royal tilts her head. “You want the world to know that Red Chaos is still Dream’s.”

It’s not a question.

“I do.” Tommy places his hands on his hips, breathing in the air that filters cold even through the mask. “I have questions and he has the answers.” His jaw settles tight. “He can’t avoid me forever.”

Royal breathes a laugh, a comforting rumble through the mouth of the lioness. “You’re always been a stubborn kind of guy, Red. I admire that about you.”

Tommy snorts. “Some would say I’m stubborn to a fault.”

“Perhaps,” Royal allows with a strange sort of inflection in her voice. “But I’ve always been curious about the depth of your loyalty.” Their eyes meet. “They call you Dream’s *dog*, a bitch and a mutt in the same breath, but loyalty doesn’t come easily in the world of Heroes and Villains.” Royal takes a step closer, taller, broader, her chest expanding, and his fingers twitches. “People envy Dream because they know you’d die for him and he threw that aside.” Royal’s eyes glimmers. “We Heroes, we gossip, and the Villains does too. Dream’s actions have left more of a commotion than you know and people are hungry for answers they think you have.”

“They’re gonna think we planned this,” Tommy voices as he stares into the eyes of the Number Six Hero. “That’s-“ He doesn’t know what to think, if he’s honest with himself, and

he falls silent.

The world thinks him a traitor but there's more to it and the one person that knows more than he wants them to is in the heart of the Syndicate.

Siren who had been there, half-awake and grasping tight to his hoodie as Tommy's heavy steps carried them further and further away from his mentor who clutches at his shoulder, red spilling dark and glistening from his shoulder to stain the green of his hoodie where the gun had fired from his hand.

"I won't tell anyone," the Villain had whispered, a ghostly echo that shadows the regret in his chest as Tommy turns his back to him, stumbling, his shoulder dragging against rough scraping bricks, choking on the emotions that wraps like barbed wire around his heart. *"I owe you that much."*

"You're stepping onto unsteady grounds, Red Chaos," Royal murmurs, turning to stare down at the grounds of Las Nevadas. "I stand here, by your side, and even I question it because the kind of loyalty you promise is not something so easily thrown aside." A breath, still in the night. "And if it is true, that Dream has chosen to turn his back on you, who will you swear your loyalty to now?" A pause. "There are those who would pay a heavy price for even a chance, especially with powers like yours."

Strobe lights stretches through the darkening sky, the large water fountain outside the casino a spot of golden shimmering water visible even where they stand, blue against white, stretching high in rising columns that spill right back down.

"My loyalty isn't for sale," Tommy bites out.

"So you say," Royal agrees, her voice giving little away to her own thoughts on the matter. "Be weary, Red. Once you're in Las Nevadas you are on your own and you play to Jester's rules." Her head tilts. "My contact is a friend of his, don't be surprised if he makes an appearance."

Tommy, truthfully, hadn't expected anything else.

Las Nevadas is neutral grounds but only to a point.

It's not called Jester's Playground in the underground web of the Pit without reason.

-

Tommy's steps are heavy, heart pounding in his chest as he squares his shoulder, the pavement dark beneath his boots, the fountain rising tall beside him, the noise almost deafening.

He takes the marble stairs two at a time, aware of the eyes that catches on him, whispers that he drowns out as he steps through the wide doors, past guards that doesn't spare him more than a look-

Suits and pretty dresses, fine jewelry that glitters with wealth blend with masks, hooded figures and flashy heavy gear.

Civilians, Heroes, Villain and Vigilantes – all gathered together inside the walls of Las Nevadas.

There's a hush, a silence in the spilling of markers against clothed tables in blue and red, the shuffling of cards halting with a drawn breath as his steps echoes, deliberate and firm against the stretch of the rug that rolls into the webbed dome of gold that spans in the large open space, high above them.

Slot machines still ring, enticing and loud with their offers, coins spilling out from a jackpot win into a waiting bag.

There are plenty of figures he recognizes, some who he had fought, close calls and not so close calls.

His eyes catches momentarily on the gleam of blue eyes from Nemesis who raises a glass of champagne in a silent toast and a shiver crawls down his spine.

He can almost feel the ghostly press of her gloved hand against the back of his neck, cheek scraping hard against the pavement where she'd pressed him down and held him still as the Blood God's axe swung towards his mentor-

"It's been fun," she'd murmured, patting his head mockingly. "Don't worry, we made sure to leave him alive. This was just to send a message, after all."

Dream had been left slumped down against the bricks, a long split in his hoodie seeping and dripping red, unconscious after the Blood God had hauled him up like ragdoll with one hand and slammed him back against them with a snap and loud wet crunch of his skull.

What message, he'd wondered, fourteen and pushing himself painfully off the ground, breath wheezing and rattling from the water that had coiled around him, nearly drowning him as the world flickered dark around him.

He'd felt like a wet rat, suit clinging uncomfortably to his skin, stumbling to sink down and press two trembling fingers against his mentor's neck as the cold November air wrapped around them both.

Dream hadn't been the Number One Hero then but he'd been climbing the ranks with terrifying speed, his popularity growing at a previously unheard rate.

Tommy hadn't allowed his second meeting with Nemesis to be anything like the first.

"Red Chaos!" Jester steps out from the crowd of people, his arms spread in welcome. "Las Nevadas welcomes you, my friend!"

Jester isn't tall, the white button-up he wears slitted to give room for the small duck wings that spreads out behind him, buttery yellow in colour and soft, almost downy looking. Black

slacks, blue suspenders and a beanie that leaves dark locks of hair barely visible where they curl out.

The mask that covers his face isn't unlike Tommy's own, metal stretching down from his nose to fold tight against the line of his jaw, filters webbing out black. But Jester's is broader, stretching out over one eye and over the side of his skull, straps dark where they secure tight against the back of his head.

It might have been imposing if not for the fact that Jester had chosen to paint a ridiculous yellow rubber duck in place of his eye.

"Jester," Tommy acknowledges as he steps forward.

Jester's single visible eye gleams as claps his hands together before he beckons Tommy along, and it's as if all sounds comes rushing back around them, conversations sweeping high and excited with pointed fingers at his back.

"To think I'd have our very own fallen Hero inside these walls," Jester muses, fine shoes clicking deliberately against the marble as he moves with confidence through the tables and games, people folding out of his way, careful to keep a distance. "A little birdie told me you're here to meet a friend of mine and I just couldn't resist the chance to talk to you before releasing you to them."

"Information is your area of expertise," Tommy acknowledges, grimacing behind his mask because *fuck-*

He'd wanted to talk to Royal's contact *first*, get things out of the way, snag whatever information he could.

Jester... is a whole other different kind of game changer. The man has an uncanny way of *knowing things* but Tommy knows that the kind of information Jester has doesn't come cheap.

Despite his wealth, despite his casino, Jester is a largely underestimated Villain in the eyes of the public, but Dream had been largely weary of him.

"*It's not his powers that makes Jester dangerous,*" his mentor had told him as he pressed a thumb down against Tommy's ear where a fucking *casino coin* had torn right through it. "*It's his tongue.*"

Tommy had made the mistake of underestimating him once, lured in by the easy banter and open body language, a charismatic kind of charm that invited to be in on the joke that lurked behind clever words and an even more clever tongue with a gleam of the single visible eye.

"That it is, that it is," Jester agrees with a laugh as he hoists himself up to a round black chair at a table, folding one leg over the knee as he gestures one hand out. "It's been far too long, man. You're looking good— I'm definitively a fan of the new branding you've got going for you." His wings spreads and then settles with a ruffle. "Red Chaos is back in town and it's clear you mean business. I couldn't be happier you've picked Las Nevadas for your return!"

People are going to be crowding at my gates hoping to catch sight of you again once they hear about it.”

A package of card is pulled from the man’s pocket, pried open, box flicked aside and cards split between clever fingers with a twist.

“You’re good for business, Red— can I call you that? Red Chaos is a bit of a mouthful.” Jester shifts demonstratively, placing both heels down on the metal poles of his chair and placing his elbows down on the table, cards spreading out to cover a smile that isn’t visible behind his mask. “Up for a game of cards, Red?”

And- Tommy has never been so fucking *relieved* for George’s cardshark ways. Dream had always been a lousy card player and while Sapnap had gotten better, especially during the last year of so, Tommy had always been able to clean them both out.

George had taught him during moments of nothing in the apartment, during late nights of a bottle of coca cola shared between them, some program or the other running and casting its bright light on the older man’s face as he split his attention between staring sleepily at the screen and brutally slaughtering Tommy in poker.

“What are we betting?” Tommy steps up on the metal pins of the chair, turning and dropping himself down on the leather seat.

“Questions and answers,” Jester says without hesitation, head tilting and wings folding against his back. “That is, if you’re up for it,” he challenges.

“One per win,” Tommy doesn’t allow himself any hesitation. “Five games and then you’re taking me to the one I’m here to see.”

Jester presses one hand dramatically against his chest with a spread of his fingers. “You wound me, Red, being so blunt.” His gaze is sharp. “But of course, I agree to your terms. Consider is a *welcome gift*, if you will.”

“I reserve the right to not answer some questions.” Tommy presses. “And I’m not telling you shit that could compromise Dream.”

“And here I was hoping you’d *not* say that,” Jester laughs, the overhand shuffle shifting into a smooth riffle. “But that suits me just fine, I’m here to learn about *you*, after all.” The Villain twists the cards together into a pile, slamming it down on the table between them. “As a sign of our growing friendship why don’t you do me the honour of the first dealing?”

You’re gonna regret that, Tommy promises himself silently, fingers folding in a web over the cards and drawing them closer with anticipation coiling through him, something desperate chasing at its heels.

“*Cards are more than just getting a good hand, Tommy,*” George had told him distractedly, mouth twitching as Tommy slumped dramatically against the table, fifteen and scowling mulishly at his cards. “*It’s about reading the other player, anticipate them and adjust your game.*”

“Doesn’t really help when I have a shit hand,” Tommy had grumbled.

“Then you give yourself a good hand,” George had shrugged, tipping his head, the words a sharp contrast against the oversized sweater that’s practically drowning him where he sits, knees drawn up and bare toes curling over the dark wood of the seat. *“Cards are only a game of chance if you allow it to be.”*

Jester wants something from him, and he clearly wants to stay on Red Chaos good side-

It doesn’t matter if he loose, he just needs one win and he has a feeling the Villain might just grant it, no-matter how it goes, if he gives him a good enough reason.

Tommy grabs the cards and slips them into an easy faro shuffle, aware of the way Jester’s eye watches him keenly with a new kind of interest.

-

There’s not much he can do about the first round – the deck is Jester’s own, gold against black, shining bright beneath the light as he spreads out a full house with a tilt of his head.

They both know Tommy has shit, and he taps his cards twice on the table before revealing a single pair and a botched attempt at getting a second one.

“So,” Jester drawls out. “I’m curious about you, Red. Tell me- where are you from?”

Tommy pauses. “Nowhere,” he answers after a moment. A brow raises at him and he shrugs, dragging his thumb over the blue rug of the table. “It’s as good of an answer you’re going to get.”

“Street kid?” Jester asks with a considering gleam of his eye, and Tommy hums, allowing it. “Plenty of us about– not many of us get anywhere though. But- look at the two of us!” He spreads his arms and wings out in an invitation of camaraderie. “You were the sidekick to the Number One Hero himself and I- well, you just have to look around, right? A Hero and the owner of the world’s most renowned casino. We’ve climbed up in the world. But-“ Jester moves, the knuckle of his finger tapping against the chin of his mask. “What is it they call you now? The-“

“I get called plenty of things,” Tommy interrupts with more bite than he means. “I’m not interested in what *they* think about me,” he tacks on as the Villain slowly lowers his hand, and he allows the implication to stand.

“Fair,” Jester hums, easing back. “I’m dealing this time.”

-

Jester wins the second round, noise loud around them, conversations that snag and distract, light shimmering bright, and Tommy isn't one bit surprised.

“Why *Red Chaos*?” Jester asks after a moment of deliberation.

“Why not?” Tommy shrugs. “Not all names have meaning.”

“I have this friend of mine, real keen on old literature,” Jester taps his cards against the table, caught between the knuckle of his index and middle finger. “And there’s this one quote that reminded me of you the first time I heard it- *‘in the midst of chaos, there’s also opportunity’*. ” The tapping halts. “Sound familiar?”

“Sun Tzu,” Tommy breathes out with a snort. “Yeah, I know it.”

“You’re a weapon, my dear Red.” Jester ignores the unimpressed look Tommy levels at him. “Don’t deny it, you and I both know it’s true.” The Villain’s brow dips. “You were... *chosen*, you must have been, the cards line up *too perfect*. I don’t trust it.”

“Believe whatever you want.” Tommy slides his cards across the table. “You deal.”

Jester considers him across the table. “I’ve always found you a bit of an odd guy.”

“I don’t want to hear that from *you*. ”

-

“Okay, so– we’ve all read the papers,” Jester says eagerly before Tommy has even finished putting down his cards. “*Red Chaos: Hero or Villain*. It was front page news for *weeks*.”

“What, exactly, is your question?” Tommy asks warily, eyes on the cards Jester rakes in, shuffling into a messy pile before placing them in the middle of the table.

“My question, Red, is- *do you consider yourself to be the good guy or the bad guy?*”

Tommy frowns at the Villain in-front of him. At Jester who had coined himself as a *casino owner* first and foremost, making no mention of the brand of *Villain* that the world had bestowed upon him.

He doesn’t know much about Jester in the first place.

Dream had marked him down as being in his twenties with a question mark, his rise and rule a shocking thing with the claim of the ground that been turned into the grand spectacle of Las Nevadas that promised something L’Manberg couldn’t.

It was likely that Jester had gone under a different name before Las Nevadas and it was very possibly wrapped in the underground web of the Pit.

He knew too much, had too many of the right people tucked beneath the rule of his thumb for it to not be the case, and Dream had drawn a line to The Syndicate, underlining it and leaving it and open question.

It was a possibility but- Jester played to his own rules, at the end of the day, something he’d made very clear, and which made him something of a wild card.

Good guy, bad guy.

Hero, Villain.

The world isn't so simple and some of the people Tommy distrust the most are Heroes, all too aware of the corruption in the system he worked inside and against.

It doesn't mean he *likes* the Villains, he's all too aware of the scars that map his skin in a history of violence and he'd never found himself in favour of a side that disregards lives so easily.

He'd put his faith and cards with his mentor, not the government, not the other Heroes, and certainly not the Villains.

"It's really depends on who you ask, doesn't it?" he says finally. "It's up to you to decide."

"I'd like for us to be *friends*," Jester tastes the word carefully, head tilting. "Though I'm not opposed to a bit of a *friends with benefits* situation, if you catch my drift."

And- Tommy really wishes he wouldn't phrase it like *that*.

"I don't fuck my friends," he says bluntly, a wry grin twisting out of sight as Jester chokes on a laugh, the sound odd through his mask.

-

Tommy spreads his cards out, a *Royal Flush* with the Ace of Spades.

It's an obnoxiously blatant move of cheating but it's all black cards branded with gold and Jester slowly twists his hand, placing his cards upside down before folding his fingers together in front of his covered mouth as he eases forward to rest on his elbows with a tilt of his head.

"Cheeky," the man tells him. "I should ban you for that."

"But you won't," Tommy says confidently. "A deal is a deal and you've had three."

He'd deliberated carefully about pulling it on the fourth or fifth round but- there's a promise of another question to be answered like this, if Jester plays his cards right.

And the man in front of him is nothing if not an opportunist.

"Alright, *Red Chaos*," Jester drags out his name, consideration in the eye that lingers on him. "Ask your question."

And- Tommy's had more than two months to deliberate, to question, to second-guess and fumble, left without information or way to turn in trying to figure out *what the hell is going on with Dream*.

He knows he can't get to Dream, not in person, not without his powers.

Even catching Royal on the communal floor, where the security was lower because *no one in their right mind* tries to mess with an entire floor of Heroes unless they have a death wish, was a gamble, and far too many near fumbles where he'd clung on the side of the building, toes and fingers frozen stiff.

The world guards its Number One Hero, sealing him away, out of Tommy's reach.

But- Dream, for all that he feared and loathed his attachments, had allowed two people other than Tommy into his life, people he called *friends*.

George would always be a gamble, he was notorious when it came to keeping to himself, and Tommy isn't so sure he could get George to talk even if he wanted to.

But-

"Where would I turn," Tommy voices carefully, running the question back and forth in his mind with a swallow before he raises his head to meet Jester's gaze, "if I wanted to get ahold of *Valorant*?"

Chapter End Notes

I'm gonna be completely frank with you all- I haven't played poker in years. Or any kind of real proper card game which made this a pain. Kindly feel free to point out if I messed something up.

Anyway! Hi! Hello! Look at us go. Second arc is coming up swinging and I hope you guys are as excited as I am.

I'm still out and about on my vacation - weather has been a bit bad so was out in a forest the other day and, ngl, there are few things I enjoy as a real good grand forest with winding paths. Saw some trees, thought about Hush, and here we are.

You guys are amazing, truly. I hope that, wherever you are, you're having a good one and that Hush can bring you a bit of joy amidst things.

Until next time :)

-

We. Have so much fanart. Dudes. I reblog everything on my tumblr [corpse-art](#) so feel free to swing by there :) I also post updates and stuff. Good vibes.

Thank you all so so much. It's absolutely fucking amazing to see it and it makes me very, very happy.

(If I link your art and you want, for whatever reason, for me to remove or change anything just let me know, yeah?)

On that note - ART:

[The Angel of Death by undefinedscream](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[different meals, different people by scytheart](#)

[Red Chaos design by lun-ar-tra-sh](#)

[The Blood God by undefinedscream](#)

[Road Trip by owlwinter8 for chapter 12](#) (also Philza approved)

[Red Chaos concept art by NYMIS](#)

[A Conversation by panddraw for chapter 8](#)

[Photo Taken Seconds Before Disaster by owlwinter8 for chapter 10](#)

[An encounter with the angel of death for chapter 2 by owlwinter8](#)

[Tommy doesn't look like a civilian by owlwinter8 for chapter 9](#)

[You look like a Tommy to me by hiblue for chapter 9](#)

[Red Chaos concept art by void-ant](#)

[Tommy in Dream vs Wilbur hoodie by Eu_nyx for chapter 9](#)

[Cooking with the angel of death for chapter 2 by scytheart](#)

[I make threats not promises Tommyinnit by 100-reasons-sbi](#)

[Tommy and the Blood God by jellyswissroll for chapter 1](#)

[Are we friends Wilbur by owlwinter8 for chapter 3](#)

[Learning to cook by owlwinter8 for chapter 2](#)

[You Got Me a Christmas Present by lilacadaisy for chapter 3](#)

[THIS IS OUR POGTOPIA by hiblue for chapter 4](#)

[Red Chaos by fridges](#)

Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy knows something about his question has struck wrong when there's a shift of energy.

Jester's body stills for a breath of a moment, a beat of his heart, something sharp and dangerous in the single eye that regards him as the owner of Las Nevadas straightens out his shoulders, wings flat and tense against the lines of his spine, one hand reaching back to clasp against the back of his neck.

It's not a nervous motion, there's no anxious tapping, no rubbing, nothing of the tells that had been prevalent through their conversation, just a stilling of motion that makes the hair at the back of Tommy's neck rise with a crawl of something cold along his spine.

He slips a hand down, fingers brushing against the handle of the knife strapped to his thigh, but he doesn't grasp it, hoping against all odds that he's misreading the situation.

"Valorant," Jester tastes the name carefully. *"The Number Nine Hero - that Valorant."*

Did Sapnap have some fucking history with Jester that Tommy had missed?

His mind scrambles but he can't fucking remember anything that sticks out, that would hint to a near death, a grudge, anything and-

Sapnap had never exactly been the type to keep his opinions on other Heroes or Villains a *secret*. His grudge against Schlatt was an open livid nerve in the tower that had flared up violent and sudden and Tommy hadn't thought it odd, he nursed a dirty grudge on Schlatt himself, and he'd been amused by it until Sapnap had nearly died after a direct confrontation.

It never makes the papers, never leaves the town.

Schlatt's reach runs widespread and deep and it makes him a dangerous man.

"Why the hell would you challenge him!?" Dream had demanded, fury and worry mixing into a horrible combination as George clutched Sapnap's undamaged hand tighter, knuckles white, shoulders hunched and mouth drawn in a thin line as he cast a warning look at Tommy. *"What could possibly have possessed you to go up on your own again Schlatt of all fucking people!?"*

Sapnap had refused to answer, his chest bare and covered in goop, a gory wrap of first, second and third degree wounds stretching over his chest, wrapping around his right shoulder, something Tommy hadn't thought possible because of the way his own powers ran hot beneath his skin.

The son of a Bad, who was a full-blood demon, a creature of fire, and yet-

He'd clutched Dream's wrist, holding him back when he lurched forward, emotions burning in his green eyes, jaw clenching tight, and something horribly wretched flaring dark before he abruptly turned on his heel and yanked his wrist free before he marched out of the room, door slamming shut behind him.

"I had to," Sapnap had told him days later, when Tommy was bent over him with medical tweezers, slowly peeling dead skin away as the older teen fisted the blanked beneath him tight, face flushed, sweat damp on his skin and clearly not all there with the feverish glow in his eyes. *"I had to- I had to do it- he can't get away with it, Tommy, he can't-"*

"And he won't," was all Tommy had thought to say as he discarded another piece of skin aside, wrinkling his nose at the smell of pus, burnt skin and sickness that laid heavy in the warm room. *"He deserved all you gave him and more."*

But *Jester*? Tommy knows they had crossed paths, he tried to keep an eye on missions George and Sapnap ran outside the times they joined with him and Dream, which was rarer, and Sapnap's patrols ran closer to Las Nevadas than any of them but-

Jester holds a grudge towards Schlatt, the only person who wasn't welcome inside the walls of Las Nevadas-

"Yeah," he forces out, tone as neutral as he can make it. "Just a friendly visit. I have some questions."

"And you think *Valorant* has the answers." Jester's tone is impossible to read, his eye never leaving Tommy, and it makes his shoulders draw tense, the tips of his fingers inching over the handle of his knife and clenching tight as he breathes in and out, forcing calm on himself.

"Possibly," Tommy answers evasively. *"I won,"* he pushes tensely. "If you know where I can find *Valorant*-"

"I owe it to tell you, is what you're trying to say, hm?" Jester's face might be hidden but Tommy has the feeling the man is grinning beneath it, wide, dangerous, his own muscles rippling in response. "I don't owe you Heroes *anything*. You're playing on *my* good will. You are here because *I* allow you to be so don't push your luck, *Red Chaos*."

"I'm not," Tommy bites out. "I'm playing *your* game with *your* rules."

"I'm not so sure you are," Jester laughs without humour, head tipping before he suddenly raised his hand, flagging down a passing waiter who immediately steps up beside them, lowering the tray without a word, the :] on the square cardboard masks offering little to read. "Have a drink with me, Red."

I'm a minor, Tommy thinks but does not say with a grimace behind his mask.

It's not the first time he's been offered alcohol during missions, and he knows his tolerance well enough thanks to Dream and Sapnap who had worked him through different alcohols during a week in September *just* for these kind of situations.

A round glass with amber liquid slides over the table and Tommy wraps his fingers around it, lifting it up with a breath, nose wrinkling at the heavy scent of smokey whiskey.

“I’m not in the business of just handing out information on others all willy-nilly,” Jester tells him as he unlatches the lower half of his mask, and Tommy slides his gaze down to his own glass before lifting to press his thumb against the side-latch, mask splitting open in a wide smile that stretches almost all the way up to his ears. “Not without a good reason.”

“That wasn’t the deal,” Tommy lowers his voice into a gritty growl that makes his throat itch as he lifts the glass up and takes a small sip.

“No,” Jester admits, swallowing the content of his glass before his mask clicked back shut, voice changer settling back in place, a breath drawn and then released. “*See*, the thing about guys like *you*, Red, is that you’re dangerous to everyone but the one you’re loyal to.”

Tommy furrows his brow, taking another small sip, letting the heat of the liquid climb down his throat to settle against the creeping chill in his chest.

“What’s to say I’m not sending Valorant into an early death by telling you what I know?” Jester spreads his hands against a backdrop of a golden web that stretches far above them both. “I certainly wouldn’t want that on my conscience *so*- I need a *reassurance*, something that tells me you can be trusted.”

“I don’t kill.”

“Ah.” Jester’s eye fixates on him. “But therein lies the problem, my dear Red. *Dream* claimed the same thing and look where we are now.” He spreads his hands out and-

Fuck, Tommy thinks with feeling, taking a mouthful of alcohol and swallowing it down before lowering his glass to the table and closing his mask shut with a low *click* as it sealed shut with a snap of his jaw, grimace hidden.

If Jester was confident enough to say that- it meant that he was associated with the Syndicate one way or the other.

It meant that Siren had been *talking* and that wasn’t good, for all that it doesn’t surprise him.

His fingers tightens around the glass and he works his jaw loose.

“*I don’t kill*,” he repeats, forcing himself to meet Jester’s gaze. “If you know anything about that night it means you know why I’m here as well.”

Jester hums. “Quite heroic, protecting a Villain from the Number One Hero himself. Made for quite the picture in the papers as well.” His head tilts, an unreadable sort of look that Tommy can’t make heads or tails of. “If that’s what happened at all. See-“ he continues ruthlessly as Tommy straightens out indignantly, “-I want to trust you, Red, I *do*. We’ve all been following your climb to the top, your pay donated to all these little charities instead of tucked away. The good little Hero who doesn’t care about fame or money, content in Dream’s

shadow, happy to do what he's told- but what's to say all of this isn't just another plan between you and him, hm?" Jester challenges. "Because I don't like being *used*."

"You're the one who wanted to play," Tommy bites out, frustrated, but-

Fuck, alright, he gets where Jester is coming from, loathe as he is to admit it, and-

"I won't tell anyone," Siren had told him as he stumbled away from the Villain. *"I owe you that much."*

If Siren had just shared the bare bones of what went down that evening then-

Maybe the Villain had kept his word.

The thought is fucking odd but it's the way the pieces slot up, or maybe Jester wasn't fully associated with the Syndicate but had just paid for bits of information from someone within the organization- *hell* if Tommy knows.

"I don't know what you want to hear," Tommy says finally because this is still a chance, Jester knows something about Valorant and Tommy desperately wants that information. "If you won't take my word for it then what do you want me to do?"

"Tell me something," Jester challenges. "Something no-one else knows about you."

Tommy snorts, the sound oddly metallic through his mask. "Yeah, sure. Because that sounds *fun*. You and I both know it would take something personal for that to mean something and that's quite the thing to ask for."

Jester shrugs, looking at ease where he sits, the alcohol clearly having mellowed his mood.

It's fucking irritating. The Villain clearly waiting for him to decide if it was worth it, clearly uninterested in just handing him the fucking information Tommy had won *fair and square* with his cheating.

He clenches his jaw, frowning behind his mask as he pushes the frustration aside.

On one hand he's not *unhappy* about Jester not just handing the information out because if Tommy was anyone else that would be fucking dangerous, and while he's *angry* at Sapnap that anger is twisted with a truckload of other feelings because they've known each other for *years* and Tommy-

Tommy still *cares*.

Tommy misses Sapnap and his humour, his sharp words and out of left field comments, their moments in the garage, just tinkering away, late nights of card games and his grumpy cooking that filled the apartment with scents that had him splayed out on the couch, stomach rumbling and mouth watering as he begged the older to hurry up.

He misses how *relieving* it was when Sapnap would arrive on scene, flames already licking up his arms, a steady confidence and reassurance when things had been pressed, grin

spreading cocky where it was visible beneath his mask.

Tommy misses having someone, *anyone*, in his corner and while Sapnap and George were both Dream's friends, and not *his*, there had still been *something*.

And if this is shit, if Tommy had just misunderstood everything he'd thought was there, he still wants to fucking *talk* to Sapnap and demand answers because he can't keep stumbling about like this.

Which means he has to get his hands on Sapnap.

And fucking *Jester* is his best bet.

To hell with it all.

"It stays between us," he demands, layering his tone thick with warning.

"Of course!" Jester perks up, excitement clear even as he pushes it down. "It's just a *reassurance*, something for me to chew on if you decide to misuse the information, you know?" Jester taps two fingers against his chest, above his heart. "I deal with information, it's what I do, and this is just something for *me*, as long as you keep your word."

Tommy knows that Jester is an odd Villain, liked by the general public for his grandiose style, extravaganza and cleverness, capable of talking circles around the Heroes who'd challenged him, and honourable in a way that was rare in their business.

It doesn't make him trustworthy by any means but in a trade of information-

The thing is to give some kind of confirmation of a rumour, something Tommy knows is true, Jester will be happy to know, but not something that he can't deny if Jester decides to be an asshole about it and sell to someone else.

"Dream," Tommy forces out, hoping, praying, he's not making a fucking mistake, "is the closest thing I have to *family*."

Jester's entire body stills and Tommy watches him, heart loud, and chest squeezing tight.

His and Dream's relationship has been debated to death for years, even before he stepped into the Hero scene, because while he hadn't been an official Hero he'd still appeared on the occasional mission that Dream had deemed safe enough, or dangerous enough to risk it if it meant having a back-up on hand.

Everyone knows Tommy is loyal. *Family* is a weakness layered into something where it doesn't belong and a dangerous card in the wrong hands.

"Brother?" Jester prods with clear interest.

"Don't push it," Tommy bites out, unimpressed.

“The *lovers* rumour must have been something,” Jester hums, amusement clear. “It’s been quite popular, you know?”

“I’m aware,” Tommy says flatly because, yeah, *no*, some of those rumours left a bad taste in his mouth.

“But family huh,” Jester muses in an undertone, despite the loud noise around them. “I suppose that explains a lot of things, your powers among them.”

And, *yeah*, Tommy certainly isn’t about to correct him about *that*.

“And you’re worried about him, enough that you’re here, looking for information,” Jester continues, fingers tapping thoughtfully. “Family is always complicated, though it leaves me with a bunch of new questions, clever, and not that anyone would believe me if I told them either... Fair enough, I’ll take it.” His tapping stills. “Loyalty to family, but not so blind as to abandon your morals.”

“I just want to talk to Valorant.” Tommy curls his fingers around the edge of his seat between his legs as he leans forward. “Nothing else.”

“Alright, alright, I hear you-“ His mouth snaps shut and something strange settles in Jester’s gaze, head tilting and eye settling on something behind Tommy.

“I told you *thirty minutes*, Chronos,” Jester bites out with thinly hidden annoyance as Tommy tips his head back.

“I got impatient,” the Vigilante answers, wrapped in a colour-block coat with a spiral in neon green mark on his chest, goggles pinned over the hood drawn down, leaving strands of brown sticking out messily, and Tommy notes that one of the laces of his converse, in matching colour scheme, were entirely undone. “You know me.” Chronos spreads his hands out innocently. “I could only be distracted for so long even if the topic of conversation was most... *riveting*.”

“I was hoping he’d bore you to sleep,” Jester sighs, planting one elbow on the table and dropping his cheek into it. “Was it the *mouth bones* one again? Because he pulled that one while staring intensively at me while I ate this morning.”

“I fled when he tried to stick his fingers into my mouth.” Chronos taps a finger against the mask slotted over his face, a slimmed sort of thing that isn’t too far from a gasmask with angular green spirals over the two filters. “I love the guy but sometimes I wonder where you found him.”

“He found *me* and hell if I know where he crawled out from,” Jester laughs, waving to the empty seat beside him. “Come on, *join us*, Red here was just asking me about Valorant.”

“I know,” Chronos admits easily and Tommy *feels* the way the man’s gaze lingers on him even as he hoists himself up, looking entirely at ease beside the Villain. “Hello, Red Chaos. I don’t believe we’ve officially met before this, but I could be wrong, I mix things up occasionally. Kinda comes with the territory.”

Chronos was a well-known and fairly popular Vigilante, though his powers were something of a mystery. He tended to appear and disappear at odd intervals and there were rumours about him being able to manipulate *time itself* despite him debunking it in a spectacular interview he'd done after taking a TV-tower hostage, spreading his arms out grandly on the couch and crossing his legs as it was broadcasted on all channels.

It had been just months before Tommy had stepped into the Hero scene and Chronos had waved goodbye with a cheeky wink just seconds before the Heroes had arrived.

"We haven't met," Tommy settles on after a moment, tilting his head. "Are you—"

"A certain lion's contact, yep," the Vigilante agrees easily, tucking one booted foot beneath his thigh and letting the other swing from his chair. "Or perhaps more accurately they're *mine*. We have some things to talk about, you and I, and I just couldn't help myself when the opportunity presented itself."

That's- *what*.

"I'm not done with him," Jester says before Tommy could open his mouth, his tone sharp, turning bodily towards the Vigilante to a tightening of Tommy's shoulders.

"Ah, right, your card game—" Chronos waves his hand. "I can fill him in about Valorant, no worries—"

"I'm definitively worried," Jester hisses. "*Chronos*—"

"*Jester*," the Vigilante echoes back in the same tone. "Red here doesn't want to hurt Valorant, just ask him some questions." A considering lingering glance on him. "Valorant owes him some answers so don't worry your fluffy head about it, alright? It's between the two of them, and he won the game fair and- uh, I mean, you agreed to answer it so..."

Tommy stares at the Vigilante, something frail like hope in his chest, heart pounding

"You—" Jester drops his hands down on the table, fingers spreading out, exasperation in every line of his body with a ruffle of his wings. "I hate it when you get all cryptic, you know that?"

"What kind of Vigilante would I be if I *wasn't*? It's all about the brand, baby." Chronos reaches out to pat his shoulder in consolation. "Now, I don't want to get all your feathers in a ruffle but we *really* need to get this underway because Schlatt is on his way here."

Tommy and Jester both turn bodily towards him.

"*What?*" Tommy demands.

"The *hell?*" Jester splutters. "You couldn't have told me that earlier!? Why is he—"

"For him." The Vigilante gestures loosely to Tommy who straightens up, shoulders and back stiff as Jester locks his gaze on him. "Your return isn't without consequence. It made it easier

for me to finally find you *but* it's also put something of a target on your head." Chronos shakes his head. "I don't know how much time we have but I *need* to talk to you."

"Then talk," Tommy bites out, fingers curling tight where he sits, head spinning because *fuck*.

"Jester-" The Vigilante tips his head towards the Villain. "Give us a moment, alright love?"

"Don't call me that," Jester mutters, eye lingering for a moment longer on Tommy before he let out a rough breath, sliding off the chair with a clack of fancy dress shoes. "I'm putting a lot of trust in you here, *Red*. You better not fuck me over."

He raises a hand in a wave over his shoulder before disappearing amidst the mass of people, and Tommy turns to Chronos who gives him a sympathetic look. "I'm sorry so spring all of this on you like this but there's no *time*. You'll find Valorant in an alleyway on the 35th street south of the Hero tower two days from now seven minutes past 2 pm."

"How-"

"No time," Chronos interrupts him, his shoulders noticeably tense as he leans forward. "Just-listen for a minute, alright?"

"Alright," Tommy agrees warily, looping the information.

35th street, south of the Hero tower, seven minutes past 2 pm-

He knows that place. Dream had often stopped near there to feed a particular feral patchy-looking cat-

"My powers," the man says very quietly in a rush, "are decisions based. When I touch someone I can temporarily latch my powers onto them, and depending on how strong the connection is, the longer I hold onto them, I see more or less of the decisions they make. It's not always accurate, people change their minds all the time, *but-* it gives me a sense for where I need to be and when I need to be there." Chronos draws a breath as Tommy stares at him, mind reeling because-

Years of speculations and guesses, rumours of time travel and time manipulation and-

"Dream," Chronos says and Tommy forgets to be shocked, all his attention locking onto the Vigilante, "and you have always been connected, I've seen you through Valorant, even before you made a Hero, just a child-" The man cuts himself off, ignoring Tommy who'd shot up, panic bubbling up because- "I wasn't in the Hero program, but I know about it, and I knew to keep away from it. It's part of why I became a Vigilante and-"

Something passes over the man's face, pupils dilating and then narrowing, palm pressing down against his temple with a rough shake of his head.

"We're running out of time-" Chronos sucks in a breath as Tommy opens his mouth. "I haven't told anyone, before you ask, I know- I wouldn't do that to you, it's your business, I don't- I usually try not to get myself too involved, it's not my *style*. But a little over two

months ago you and Dream disappeared entirely from my visions, despite my powers still being latched onto the two of you.”

“What-?” Tommy manages weakly. “I’m- I’d get if *I* did-“

“You do?” the Vigilante interrupts in interest.

“- but I don’t get why *Dream* would, if I understand your powers right.” Tommy isn’t so entirely sure he does because what the *fuck*-?

“Well, bugger,” Chronos mutters, fingers tangling to tug at a loose strand of hair poking out from his hood. “I was hoping- anyway, doesn’t matter now, Schlatt is practically knocking and- look. *You* need to figure things out-“

“I’m trying to,” Tommy bites out waspishly.

“- and get this- this under control because my visions, everything is out of order, *nothing makes sense*, and it’s- I can’t work like this, I want to sleep for an eternity from just getting you and me here at this table and-“ Chronos pauses. “Well, enough about me, I don’t really matter, I just needed to tell you where Valorant is because Jester was about to do you dirty – please forgive him, he’s a tad overprotective, he means well, he does, and if you told him- but you won’t so...” he trails off.

Tommy stares at him.

“Right.” Chronos slaps his hands down on his thighs. “Here’s the deal, me and Jester and well, Valorant, we’re in a relationship, a trio, very lovey dovey, it’s cute and sweet-“

“What?” Tommy squawks in shock. “*Valorant* is-“

“Yes,” Chronos interrupts impatiently. “I already told you, keep up, so- anyway, don’t tell them I told you, they’re very-“ He pauses. “Look, it gets messy when you’re in a weird Hero, Villain, Vigilante trio, yeah? We try to balance things but it’s not always as straightforward as I’d like it to be and sometimes- well, I’m the middleguy here, so- *look*, this Dream situation, it’s looking messy, I keep seeing things and then it blanks out completely and- you need to fix this. Valorant has wiped his hands off the situation and 404 is... I don’t know where he is, I tried finding him as well but-“ Chronos snaps his mouth shut, visibly annoyed with himself. “Anyway. You’re the only other person who knows Dream, and you’re close, and while I feel a tad *guilty* about pinning this on you I don’t see anyone else who *can*.”

Tommy jerks as the Vigilante suddenly lurches forward, shaking his head violently with a groan of pain as his eyes fluttered close, a wheezed breath tapering into an awkward laugh.

“*Oh*, Schlatt is so very determined to get you, gotta give him credit, when he’s put his mind to something-“ Chronos rubs his head. “Look. I don’t know much, I wish I could tell you more, but I *can’t*, because my visions are a mess right now and I’m starting to wonder if I’m hallucinating at least half of them because they make about *zero sense*- but you need to meet Valorant and you need- you need to think outside the box because this is big- it’s- all the big players are coming out to play.”

“Like Schlatt,” Tommy says flatly, peering warily towards the doors barely visible from his position.

“Like *Dream*,” Chronos corrects absently. “Bird feathers, phantom touch and bloody tusks *look*- you saved the life of Siren, there has to be something you can use there, everyone knows how honour bound the Syndicate is and you- you paid with *everything*. That’s a heavy debt. Sap- *Valorant*-“ Chronos corrects hastily, “knows how to get you in contact with them-“

“Not interested,” Tommy interrupts.

“I don’t care,” Chronos says plainly. “*Make* yourself interested. I don’t want to be here but now I am, we all make sacrifices-“

Tommy slams a palm down on the table, pushing off the chair with a thunk of his boots. “We’re done,” he bites out, fury wrapping tight around him, burning sharp and hot like needles beneath his skin as the Vigilante wilts in his seat.

“I’m sorry,” Chronos squeezes out, slipping off his own chair with a quiet noise, slinking at his heels, “that was- it uncalled for.” A beat. “And untrue.”

“No fucking *kidding*,” Tommy growls, twisting on his heel. “You have no fucking right to talk to me about *sacrifices*. ”

“You-“ Chronos comes to an abrupt halt and draws a breath, hands raised in surrender.

“Look, Schlatt is making a grand entrance and if you want to avoid him...” The Vigilante slowly lowers his hands as Tommy’s chest roughly expands and lowers in forced calm.

“Look- I’m tired, I’m *trying*, but this whole situation got my brain all twisted up and I can’t-“ He blinks, shaking himself. “Back entrance. I can show you.”

And-

I don’t trust you, Tommy thinks desperately, something hysterical and wretched in his chest. *I don’t trust anyone*.

But what else is he supposed to *do*?

“Then *show me*,” Tommy bites out with frustration.

The Vigilante draws a breath, releases it. “Thank you,” he says.

-

“You need to dig into the Hero commission,” Chronos tells him as he drags Tommy along through a dark corridor, never pausing to peer around corners, but sometimes stumbling, forcing Tommy to drag him up and push him on as the Vigilante wheezed and blinked dizzily around himself before he picked up steam again.

It’s discomfiting and odd, like the man is loosing his grasp of reality, seeing more than Tommy is aware of.

Which he *is*, apparently, and Tommy still doesn't know what to make of *that*.

"What about them?" Tommy grits out, grip tense as he yanks Chronos from tripping over fucking *air*.

"I don't know," the other admits without guilt. "I mean, I tried to look into it, you know? But- my powers aren't working right- I've been holding onto too many but I can't *not* because if I let go of Schlatt and Dream then-" The Vigilante shakes his head. "I can't keep it much longer- I'm already pushing my limits, but we need to get you out, you have to be *safe*-"

"Then how can you be so *sure* that's where I need to look?" Tommy interrupts before the Vigilante can do down another spiral.

"I *don't*. It's just one of those feelings, you know?"

"Helpful," Tommy hisses in annoyance, struggling to not turn around as the first scream rang out, muffled by the walls around them.

Chronos makes no notice of finding anything amiss, turning left with an abruptness that nearly jerks Tommy's shoulder out of its socket.

"What about Schlatt?" Tommy demands as he picks up his pace, side-by-side with the Vigilante now. "There's something wrong there-"

"We have bigger issues to deal with," Chronos cuts him off. "I know- I know you don't believe me when I say that but we *do*."

The hell we do, Tommy thinks with a clenching of his jaw because Schlatt is a direct threat to Dream and he's not about to leave that alone.

Besides, if the situation is as big as Chronos is implying it to be they need *Dream*.

Tommy needs him. He's not-

He's made to follow, not to lead, that's not who he *is*.

Red Chaos was never created to stand on his own.

Chronos stumbles again and Tommy slides to a halt when he bends over, wheezing, fingers burying beneath his hood to clutch tight against his head with a whimper and-

He makes a split decision, yanking the Vigilante's right arm up and over his shoulder before bending down and grasping the Vigilante's left thigh, awkwardly hoisting him up, warm breath pressing through the fabric of his hoodie to flare wet against his neck as Chronos grasped tight at the fabric over his chest, burrowing against him as the other arm fumbled up beneath his armpit in a janky hold.

"Right," the Vigilante forces out as Tommy's steps picks up the pace again, boots pounding loud against the flooring with the additional weight. "Next- then left, left, right, down, left and we'll be out."

Tommy clenches his jaw, pushing down how fucking *uncomfortable* it was to have someone other than Dream or Wilbur so close to him as he bodily shoved another set of double doors open, trying not to linger too long on why it was covered in fucking *green goop* as it smeared all over his upper arm and shoulder.

-

Out, is a generous description because Tommy ends up having to climb a ladder with the Vigilante mumbling nonsense against his neck.

“You’re much cuter in person you know,” Chronos giggles, grip so loose now that Tommy forces himself to pause, twisting and hauling the man up over his shoulder, thanking whatever *fuck* allowed the Vigilante to be shorter and lighter than himself, dangling happily as Tommy grumpily continued his way upwards. “So, so cute, like a-a *baby chick*.”

“Fuck off,” Tommy mutters distractedly, pushing up the last bit and pressing the lid open, hauling them both up and out far from the entrance of Las Nevadas.

He drops the Vigilante on the ground, rolling his stiff shoulders as the man whoozily pushed up, twisting-

Chronos flops with a groan, fingers disappearing up his hoodie again to press against his skull, shoulders and knees drawing up.

Tommy stares down at him.

“This is not helpful,” he informs the Vigilante who whimpers out a complaint as he’s once again scooped up. “The fuck am I supposed to do with you?” he hisses as he takes a right, away from whatever the *fuck* was going on in the other direction.

Jester is a big boy. He could handle Schlatt. Besides, Nemesis had been there and-

“Noooo,” Chronos whines. “Have to- have to *leave me*.”

“Fuck if I’m doing that,” Tommy snorts. “Anyone could snag you up like this, dude. And Jester would probably kill me.” A beat. “Valorant absolutely would if you’re fucking *dating him*.”

“Fiancés.” Chronos jerks his hand up abruptly, nearly smacking him in the face, and wiggles a glowed hand in his face. “*Fiancés*.”

“Whatever,” Tommy growls. “I don’t care about the- look, can you snap out of it and be a *little bit* helpful here?”

“I am,” the Vigilante disagrees with a mumble. “*I helped*.”

“Sure did,” Tommy mutters.

35th street, south of the Hero tower, seven minutes past 2 pm-

He breathes out roughly, jaw clenching tight as something exploded loudly-

“Pushed too much,” Chronos groans against his back where he dangles, fingers curling into the back of his hoodie with a tired laugh. “They’ll be mad again.”

“I’m sure it’ll be fine,” Tommy answers distractedly, ignoring a civilian whose shoes skids against the ground, pausing to gape against them both.

“The fuck are you looking at?” he demands rudely.

“Red Chaos-“ the man breathes, eyes wide and shocked as he takes a jerky step back.

“Yeah, that’s me,” Tommy interrupts cheerfully. “Fuck off before I *make you*.”

He really, *really* tries not to be exasperated when a phone is raised, steps stumbling back even as the flash went off in the night before the man twisted around, disappearing with hurried steps away from Las Nevadas.

“This is your fault,” he informs the Vigilante as he ditches any ideas of trying to duck around shit and instead sets a clear path to where he’d left the fucking car.

-

Tommy dumps the Vigilante into the backseat and closes the door shut, spares a moment to roughly tug on the black jacket and yank the scarf around his neck before dragging his own shut, breathing out inside the expensive car with its tinted windows.

He twists around, climbing into the backseat and yanks Chronos into a sitting position with a mumble, eyes opening blearily, wide and confused.

“Wh’re you?” Chronos asks blearily, shrinking back. “Nap’tus?”

Tommy pauses. “No,” he gets out, frowning. “Chronos?”

“s not my name,” the Vigilante protests as Tommy sneaks a hand into the dip of the man’s coat, pressing against his pulse.

“Yeah?” he asks distractedly because *fucking hell*, that was too fast, jackrabbiting inside the Vigilante’s chest, which was decidedly not good.

“Karl,” the Vigilante tells him whoozily. “Karl Ja’obs.”

“Right,” Tommy settles uncomfortably on, unsure as to why it sounded *familiar* as he reached out and yanked the seatbelt over him and pressing it down with a *click*.

“Don’t feel good,” Chronos chokes out. “’urts.”

“Do you have a phone?” Tommy asks, one hand pressing against his mask to turn his voice changer off as wide eyes blinks up at him. “Hey- hey, I’m a friend, alright? I’m only here to *help*.”

“Hurts,” the Vigilante presses, voice small.

“I know,” Tommy soothes, neck prickling uncomfortably as he swallows. “Phone?”

The Vigilante slowly shakes his head.

“Right.” Tommy pats his pockets for his own, pulling it out and opening Royal’s contact, thumb hovering hesitantly-

“He doesn’t look well, does he?” A voice muses from beside him and Tommy jerks with a choked noise, staring wide-eyed down at the slime on his arm that had bubbled to form a small head with eyes blinking brown behind square glasses as the head twisted unnaturally towards him. “Hello there, fellow human!”

“The fuck!?” Tommy blurts out, only just resisting the urge to smear him off him, skin crawling with horror.

“A common greeting, I’m learning,” the slime observes with interest, nodding its head. “I am Slimecicle! Who are you?”

“... Why the fuck are you on me?” Tommy demands as the slime stretches up, an upper body and arms plopping out with fingers that stretches out in a weave in front of the tiny... man. “Do you just leave yourself *slimed up* on doors and wait for unsuspecting people to latch onto?”

“It’s a safety precaution!” Slimecicle informs him happily. “Jester is a smart guy, you know?”

“Right,” Tommy groans. “Do you know what’s wrong with Chronos?”

Slimecicle blinks behind his glasses, head slowly tipping, skin green and dripping, little bubbly drops that seep and sinks through his hoodie to press cold against his skin and *fucking hell that's weird-*

“Looks like he overused his powers again.” Slimecicle folds small arms, nodding to himself. “I’ve seen it before.”

“Well, how the fuck do I turn it off?” Tommy demands as he debates about the morality of just *pinching* the little fucker’s neck and depositing him far away from him. “He’s all *loopy*.”

“I have no idea,” the slime tells him, voice perky and entirely unhelpful.

“Fantastic,” Tommy breathes, twisting around and slumping back in the driver seat, grabbing the slime bodily and lifting him up, staring into the wide guileless brown eyes. “*You-* keep an eye on him, alright? We need to get the fuck out of here before Schlatt scents us out.”

“Oooh, I can do that!” The slime happily slips between his fingers, leaving a goopy trail that Tommy discreetly reaches out to wipe on the passenger seat as the small figure climbs back into the backseat, sliding down only to hoist himself up, settling carefully beside the Vigilante who mumbles and reaches out blindly-

Fingers flattens the small slime man with a *squelch* and both Tommy and Chronos stares down at the puddle of green goo.

“Oh god.” The Vigilante slowly lifts his hand up, spreading his fingers out, eyes wide with horror. “*I killed him.*”

Chapter End Notes

Ayup my guys, welcome back to another chapter of Hush :)

We're finally meeting the last piece in the Karlnapity trio and things are *heating up*. Literally. New players are stepping out and we even got our own goopy boi making an appearance.

Tommy is having a grand time as always.

You guys are amazing, sending you all good vibes as I venture to take a nap before some minecraft gaming.

Until next time :)

-

Bruh, we have so much fanart my end notes can't fit them all anymore, the heck. How is that fair. I'll figure out how to fix this- just, I'll get back to you on this, alright? Very, very sorry about this quick fix meanwhile.

-

We. Have so much fanart. Dudes. I reblog everything on my tumblr [corpse-art](#) so feel free to swing by there :)

Thank you all so so much. It's absolutely fucking amazing to see it and it makes me very, very happy.

(If I link your art and you want, for whatever reason, for me to remove or change anything just let me know, yeah?)

On that note - ART:

[Contrasting Realities by dayseagedoodles](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[Red Chaos by kathyrealmstales](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[Red Chaos by karma-uh](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[The Angel of Death by undefinedscream](#)

[different meals, different people by scytheart](#)

[Red Chaos design by lun-ar-tra-sh](#)

[The Blood God by undefinedscream](#)

[Road Trip by owlwinter8 for chapter 12](#) (also Philza approved)

[Red Chaos concept art by NYMIS](#)

[A Conversation by panddraw for chapter 8](#)

[Photo Taken Seconds Before Disaster by owlwinter8 for chapter 10](#)

[An encounter with the angel of death for chapter 2 by owlwinter8](#)

[Tommy doesn't look like a civilian by owlwinter8 for chapter 9](#)

[You look like a Tommy to me by hiblue for chapter 9](#)

[Red Chaos concept art by void-ant](#)

[Tommy in Dream vs Wilbur hoodie by Eu_nyx for chapter 9](#)

[Cooking with the angel of death for chapter 2 by scytheart](#)

[I make threats not promises Tommyinnit by 100-reasons-sbi](#)

[Tommy and the Blood God by jellyswissroll for chapter 1](#)

[Are we friends Wilbur by owlwinter8 for chapter 3](#)

[Learning to cook by owlwinter8 for chapter 2](#)

Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Once Tommy had managed to convince the Vigilante, Chronos, Karl, *whatever*, that he had, in fact, *not* murdered Slimecicle, Tommy had sighted the glow of lava a bit too close for comfort and made the executive decision to get them *the fuck out of there*.

He needs a place to stop, to pause, to *breathe*, because it feels like he's been hit with a sledgehammer and then thrown off a fucking plane with zero time to react and take in one thing before he'd gone into the next.

He glances at the rearview mirror, at Karl, at *Sapnap's fiancé*, and his stomach twists, swallowing thickly as he focuses back on the road, at the lights that swooshes past them, at the black concrete road with its stark white lines and the night sky that stretches above them.

He takes a hard right into the next lane and floors the gas pedal, away from Las Nevadas and far away from the spiraling rise of the white Hero tower that stands proud in the heart of L'Manberg.

-

Tommy stops only once to abandon the fancy car, trading it out for something more discreet with only a bit of trouble as he has to half-haul a woozy Chronos who blinks up at him without recognition and a mumble of nonsense that Tommy awkwardly pats his shoulder to.

Slimecicle hitches a ride on the Vigilante's shoulder, looking unbothered by the entire situation as he hummed tunelessly to himself, small legs, a recent addition, kicking happily, one hand grasping tight to the collar of Chronos' coat.

Tommy spares a moment to check the Vigilante's pulse, still far too fast, brow damp and furrowed, one hand grasping and releasing the fabric of his pants where he sits, offering no protest as Tommy clicks the seatbelt in place, just a blank look that says too much and little at all.

"You'll be fine," Tommy finds himself muttering, feeling useless as he closes the door shut, one hand rising to rub against the back of his neck as he leans back against the car, peering up into the sky above him.

The same sky he'd looked upon as a child, starving and cold, lost to the gaping jaws of survival.

"You look like a Tommy to me."

He closes his eyes, breathes in, and then out, opens the door and slides inside, shutting the door tight.

-

“Are we going on an adventure?” Slimecicle asks as Tommy fiddles with the radio, settling blindly on some crappy rock, too tired to care about finding something better but desperate to drown the silence in the car. “I’ve never been on an adventure before!”

“Yeah, sure,” Tommy snorts, casting another glance at the Vigilante who had tipped over, face smushed uncomfortably against the glass but by all appearance finally asleep. “Do you have a way to contact Jester?”

Slimecicle perks up, brown eyes bright behind square glasses. “My body can take a message Mr. Red Chaos!”

Tommy slows down at a red light, slowly craning around to look at the slime. “The fuck do you mean with your *body*.”

“I am just a piece of the bigger me!” Slimecicle informs him cheerfully. “Jester says that all we’re good for is being a messenger system.” He smiles, green goop drooping from his chin to spill against his legs where it was absorbed back into his body.

“Lovely,” Tommy breathes. “Can you-“ He focuses back on the road as the car behind them honks, sticking a hand out to give them a middle finger as he took a hard right with a firm twist of the wheel. “Look, can you tell him that I *haven’t* kidnapped Chronos?”

Slimecicle presses his palms together. “But that would be a lie. I don’t like lying.”

“It’s not a *lie*, ” Tommy mutters indignantly. “I’m not- I couldn’t just *leave him*. ”

“Don’t worry!” Slimecicle reassures him. “I told Jester that we’re on an adventure!”

“... What did you say about Chronos?” Tommy takes a left, eyes flicking over the surrounding area, finding a familiar sign and breathing out as he picked up speed, inching just a snap over the allowed limit as he passed it by.

“That he’s taking a nap!” Slimecicle pats a goopy hand against the cheek of the Vigilante. “Poor guy looks exhausted.”

“Lovely,” Tommy forces out, swallowing a hysterical noise as the phone in his pocket vibrated for the fifth time.

-

It’s nearly an hour later when Tommy finally slows the car to a halt after driving down an empty road, letting the trees swallow them up outside an abandoned summer home.

He collapses back against the seat, yanking his beanie off and dragging a hand through the sweaty strands of his hair, staring blankly out through the car window.

The engine is finally silent and radio shut off to leave him with nothing but the strained breathing of the Vigilante and the low bubbling snores of the slime that had tucked himself

into the front pocket of Chronos' jacket, mumbling contently with a smile on his lips.

"Fuck." Tommy laughs, burrowing both hands into his pants and clenching tight. "*Fuck.*"

How-

What the hell even was *this*? What the fuck was he-

Tommy tugs roughly at his hair, eyes clenching shut as a shiver runs through his body, jaw clenching tight as he swallows with a grimace, forcing himself to breathe slowly in and then out, feeling small where he sits in a stolen car in the middle of fucking nowhere with an out-of-it Vigilante and a fucking *slime*.

His phone buzzes, another call, he doesn't know how many of them he's been ignoring now but-

He breathes out and forces a hand down, sliding it out with stiff fingers and turning it on to stare blankly down at the screen.

The buzzing stops and there's a long moment of nothing before it picks up again and Tommy slides his left hand down, framing his mask, unlatching it with a hiss of air before letting it drop into his lap.

He clears his throat and then slides the green bar aside, lifting it up. "Wilbur."

"*Tommy.*" Wilbur's voice is a breath of relief, of warmth, of something that slots odd against the jagged pieces inside of him that prickles and stings with the whirling mess of his mind. "*I hope I didn't wake you up, you sound tired.*"

Tommy scrubs a hand over his face, mouth tipping helplessly up. "That's usually what happens when you call in the middle of the fucking night, man."

"*I'm sorry. I just-*" There's a pause, a rough breath.

Tommy frowns, struggling to push away everything else to give his friend his full attention. "Something wrong?"

"*Not exactly,*" Wilbur hedges, something distant in the tone of his voice as he laughs, weak and self-deprecating. "*Just- dealing with some things. You know how it is.*" Wilbur pauses and Tommy presses the phone closer against his ear, hearing the distant motion of fingers tugged through a mess of curly hair. "*Had another argument with Techno, could have dealt with it better than I did but-*" Wilbur cuts himself short, quieting, leaving Tommy with nothing but the sound of his breathing and the whistling of the wind.

He doesn't have to close his eyes to picture Wilbur in front of him- outside, round glasses and messy hair, brown eyes staring distantly out over the back of his lawn.

"Do you want to talk about it?" Tommy asks carefully, brow furrowing, trying to understand.

“No.” Tommy stares at the wheel in front of him, at the silvery mark in the middle where the horn was located, a strange temptation the longer he looks at it. *“I just needed to hear your voice,”* Wilbur says quietly.

And-

Oh, Tommy thinks, and it feels like being hit by a fucking *train*, the longing the froths thick like syrup inside his chest, desperate yawning like a dark empty abyss inside of him as he squeezes his eyes shut, curling on himself with a strangled hitch of his breath that he muffles desperately against his palm.

“You- you want me to talk?”

“If you’re not busy,” Wilbur tacks on. *“I know it’s late-“*

“No,” Tommy cuts him off hurriedly, flicking his eyes up to look at the Vigilante in his backseat. “No, I definitively have the time.” He licks his lips. “What do you want me to talk about?”

“Anything.” There’s a shuffle, snow brushed aside before he sat down heavily. *“Just- anything,”* Wilbur says roughly.

And-

“Okay,” Tommy breathes.

-

It’s awkward, getting started, but Tommy finds himself strangely finding a rhythm to it, bouncing from one subject to the next, sometimes cutting himself off, backtracking, his mind whirling down another topic, another story-

He talks about a recent documentary he’d seen, about large jellyfish, many times the size of humans just floating in the depths and *it’s really, really cool like, they don’t even have brains? They’re just- floating about, living their lives, and that’s just fucking poggers you know?*

It spirals into an article he’d read about sunflowers when he’d been researching plants, having realizing pretty quickly that his apartment *really* wasn’t meant to house obnoxiously tall flowers and *that’s just unfair, really, because it would have been so cool to just wake up to, like, a field of them and-*

He finds himself talking about the stories Bad had told him what feels like a lifetime ago, when he was just a child and the tales told still filled him with a sense of awe and wonder.

Wilbur, almost forty minutes into Tommy upholding a one-sided conversation, asks him, quite abruptly, to expand on one of those stories, and Tommy falters for on only a second before he obliges, slowing his voice, trying to remember how Bad had told it and-

It’s a strange, he thinks, to speak of something long gone to a friend who is still so new, his voice growing softer, a hush as he recalls the stories of the wither skeletons that guards their

fortresses that rises up amidst red stones and lava, mysterious forests and glowing mushrooms-

-

"I miss you," the man tells him, voice soft, wrapping gently around him when Tommy pauses to draw a breath and-

"I miss you," Tommy manages to squeeze out after drawing a sharp breath. *So, so much*, he thinks, just a bit desperately as his teeth sinks into leather and skin.

"I'm having a busy week," Wilbur murmurs back, soft so soft. *"But after this, we'll visit Pogtopia again, just the two of us."*

Tommy smiles, frail and quivering at the corners, blinking desperately to rid of the wetness in his eyes before he scrubs a sleeve roughly over them. "You promise?"

"I promise," Wilbur assures him and it settles like a gentle thing in his heart. *"Thank you, Toms. For being here."*

"I'm glad you called," Tommy admits, lowering his hand down swallowing as he glances through the rearview mirror. "I was pretty bored, you know? Nothing like hearing myself talk for two hours."

Wilbur lets out a breathy laugh. *"You seemed quite happy to go on and on and on-"*

"Fuck off," Tommy snorts, fingers tight and desperate where he holds the phone, unwilling to hang up despite knowing that he needed to. "You're just jealous of my wonderful storytelling skills."

"You keep telling yourself that." And Tommy can't see him, but he imagines Wilbur must be smiling, mouth curling up and eyes warm. *"Stay safe, gremlin. And call if anything happens, alright? Job might have me a bit busy but- I'll always make time for you."*

"You too," Tommy gets out. "Go sleep or something, old people need plenty of rest."

"I think you're mistaking adults for children," Wilbur hums. *"Go to sleep, child."*

"Bitch," Tommy shoots back reflexively before he catches himself, ducking his head with a crawl of warmth up his cheeks. "Night Wilbur."

There's a pause and then- *"Goodnight, Toms."*

He forces himself to end the call, scrubbing his sleeve over his eyes and sniffing discreetly as he glances at the rearview mirror and the two sleeping in his backseat. "Right," he tells no one in particular. "Right- one thing at the time."

Tommy opens the door to the car, kicking it shut behind him and stares out at the dark night and the trees that crowd around him as he takes a step back against cold metal.

He slides down on the snowy ground, back pressing against the tire, fingers clenching tight in the green scarf before he pressed it against his mouth, muffling the sound of his frustrated scream.

-

Tommy runs his fingers through the snow beside him, staring blankly at the rough bark of the closest tree, brow furrowed and mouth in a thin line behind his mask.

There's snow melting through his pants but he can't be bothered to care, can't be bothered to get up, because there's words circling round and round in his head and he can't make heads nor tails of half of them.

He breathes out a frustrated noise, flicking the wet from snow his fingers before raising his hand up to dig the heel of his palm into his cheek.

"Stupid fucking Vigilante," he mutters, grimacing at the sound of his voice through the voice changer.

He'd liked it, the first time he heard it. His voice had still been at that awkward stage of cracking suddenly and without mercy, something Dream had wheezed hysterically at as Tommy glowered at him with flushed cheeks.

It was designed to pick up and smooth out sound, to make something metallic, unnatural and distant.

Now it just makes him feel strangely out of touch with himself, where he sits on the cold ground.

He doesn't feel much like Red Chaos at all without Dream at his side and he keeps looping and picking through the conversation with Jester, wondering if he'd given up too much-

If he'd just waited, would Chronos have told him about Sapnap *anyway*? What had even been the fucking *point*?

He knows- he fucking *knows* that Jester was someone he didn't want to be in bad waters with, that was as good as signing away his own fucking death sentence, and the Villain had clearly been interested in knowing more about Red Chaos and he hadn't exactly been given a *choice*.

He hadn't exactly been planning on kidnapping a fucking Vigilante either but anything that gave Jester reason to second guess murdering him on the spot could only be a fucking win but-

How the *fuck* had Sapnap ended up with those two?

How much of his life is just a fucking lie?

Had he even known Sapnap at all? Had he known Dream? *George?*

Tommy doesn't fucking know and it's-

He doesn't know what it is but it makes him feel cold in a way that has nothing to do with the snow that's spiraling soft from the sky as he burrows his hands against his chest and folds over them, mouth pressing against his knees with a tired breath.

He hates that it hadn't even been the most concerning thing.

Chronos' powers not working on him he could reason with. He knew shit all about what enchantments Bad had put on the bracelet but he *knew* the demon, had known him for *years*, and Bad had always been *kind*.

Tommy knew very well that there were protection enchantments and he wouldn't put it past the demon to scrawl one down along with whatever the fuck was sealing him so completely from his own powers.

Bad is old, like fucking *ancient*, and outside discussions with the demon he hadn't even *heard* about enchantments before. Perhaps the rare discussion of some old find on the internet but-

It was one of those things that were thought to be some sort of fucking *myth*. Because the idea of being able to enchant weapons to be sharper, to have armour that protected against blasts, helmets that were enchanted to allow its wearer to breathe under water-

It wasn't something that was supposed to be possible and Bad had been firm in his decision to not pass the knowledge on.

"It dies with me," Bad had said when Tommy had caught Sapnap, hand around the handle of his new sword, shoulders tense where he stood in front of his father, back turned to Tommy who caught the lowering of Bad's head, shadows swallowing his expression with the closing of his glowing eyes. *"I'm sorry, but I can't risk it, even for you."*

And yet-

And *yet* he'd made the power dampener pulsing warm against his cold skin and it was the only thing that he knew could, reasonably, be interfering with Chronos' powers.

It didn't explain shit as to why Dream was messing with his vision, or whatever the fuck it was.

Tommy blinks tiredly at the snow.

"There's a lot of things in the world we don't understand, but that's the wonderful thing about it, isn't it?" Bad had mused to him as Tommy laid sprawled out on his couch, a sucker in his mouth as he stared up at the ceiling. *"There's always new things to discover!"*

"That's a thing old people say," Tommy had snorted around the taste of strawberries as he tipped his head to look at the demon. *"How much is there really left to discover when you're going to be outliving all of us? Even I get bored of stuff and I'm, like, twelve, you know."*

“Not all of you.” Bad’s tail had curled behind him with a small flick of the arrowed tail.

“There are others like me out there. Others who have seen the rise and fall of societies before this one and still lives and breathe to exist today.”

“Really?” Tommy had rolled around, drawing a pillow beneath his head and pressing his cheek against it. *“Are they demons like you too?”*

Bad’s eyes, glowing white in the backdrop of black, had crinkled with his smile. *“Not quite. I like to think I’m one of a kind.”*

Bad had always been an odd figure in his life, coming and going, appearing and disappearing suddenly, always with an offered sucker no matter how old Tommy got.

Tommy had always been curious and Bad, while hesitant, had indulged him on more than one occasion, protests dying out and words finally spilling out with soft nostalgia woven into them with a distant look as Tommy hung onto his every word.

Not just history, but a part of the life Bad had lived, old as coal and fire.

He’d spoken in a hush as he weaved a tale of groaning zombies that hunted the dark nights alongside rattling skeletons armed with bow and arrow from soldiers and hunters lost to the forests, tales of those who drowned only to come back to life to drag others down below to suffer the same fate-

Tales that were scoffed at, thought nothing more than stories to frighten children.

One of Tommy’s favourite things to hear about had been the *Nether*, a place long since gone that had housed the majority of the creatures that were categorized as *mobs*. Something *unnatural*, many argued, nothing like the peaceful grazing mooblooms that had disappeared in history.

“People fear what they don’t understand,” Bad had said when Tommy was complaining indignantly to him about a documentary he’d been watching that had made piglins, endermen and demons out to be something *otherly* when they had been there from the beginning too.

“The thought of portals and other dimensions are best left forgotten and then, in time, perhaps we will one day reach an understanding that we’re not so different, no matter how we look.”

Tommy hadn’t understood it. The Nether had sounded *amazing* and he’d spent his fair share of afternoons daydreaming about passing through portals to other worlds entirely, where lava bubbled and glowed instead of water, where red and blue trees stretched out and creatures he could only dream about had made their home.

Bad had claimed some of them had even *swam in the lava*.

He had seldom stopped to wonder how much of Bad’s stories were true. He was sure the demon was just indulging the rare spark of childish wonder when it came to some stories that he told him but Tommy had never asked and Bad had never told, tail flicking up his nose fondly when Tommy would lean against him with a whisper of *wow*.

Sapnap was his son, human in appearance, so different from his father, quick to anger where Bad was calm, holding grudges where Bad barely seemed to register them as such, but both were protective, admirably so, and that's where their likeness shone the most.

Tommy wonders if it's that same kind of protectiveness that had kept Sapnap quiet about such a large part of his life.

He slides his face down, pressing his closed eyes hard against his knees.

He wonders-

He wonders if there's any trust left at all between them.

-

He wonders how much he's at fault for.

-

Tommy falls asleep in the snow and he regrets it, waking up with the first cast of the morning sun, his body stiff and cold, trembling as he clenches his jaw tight and forces himself up, swaying unsteadily with one arm wrapped around himself.

He scrubs the heel of his palm tiredly over his eye as he yanks the door open and settles down with a rough breath.

"Um." Tommy slowly cranes his head around to meet the brown eyes of the Vigilante, still strapped securely in place, looking owl-like with one finger half-sunken into the body of the slime asleep in his pocket. "I swear, I'm not usually like this but- I can't-" The Vigilante slowly withdraws his finger, hands lowering to clasp in his lap with a clearing of his throat. "I'm afraid I don't quite remember how I got here?" His tone rises high with nervousness.

Tommy stares at him.

"I kidnapped you," he says flatly.

"Oh." Chronos blinks at him. "Um. You're not doing a very good job if you're just- I mean, I'm not tied up or anything..." he trails off, hands twisting to show off his bare wrists. "Not to criticize your *style* or anything-"

"Do you *want* me to tie you up?" Tommy interrupts dryly.

"Preferably not?" Chronos squeaks.

Tommy snorts tiredly. "Do you even know who I am?"

Chronos opens his mouth, closes it, leans forward to meet his gaze as Tommy stares patiently back at him. "Ah! You're- wait. I-" The Vigilante jerks, head snapping aside to stare out the car window. "Wait- wait, this isn't, you weren't supposed to *take me with you*."

“Yeah, well, I did,” Tommy says grumpily. “So deal with it.”

“No! No you don’t *understand*-”

“I *don’t care*,” Tommy cuts him off. “You were completely and utterly out of it and I wasn’t about to leave you for *Schlatt* to stumble upon you or whatever.”

He furrows his brows, staring at the Vigilante who looks like he’s having a heart attack, frozen in place, eyes still on the trees outside.

“I- I think I need to make a call,” Chronos says weakly. “Do you-“

Tommy throws his phone back, watching him catch it with a fumble before his fingers clenched tight around it.

“If you could tell your *fiancé* I haven’t touched a hair on your head that would be much appreciated. Your *friend* wasn’t very helpful.”

The Vigilante laughs nervously, fingers moving over the screen as he hunched on himself. “I- How much did I tell you yesterday?”

“Enough to know you’re living a really screwy life, *Karl Jacobs*,” Tommy says with a baring of his teeth behind the mask. “But I suppose that just puts the two of us a bit more even ground, right?”

“Right,” Chronos says weakly. “I’d, um, appreciate it if you- if you kept that to yourself.”

It hadn’t taken long for him to put the pieces together, to realize *why* the name had rung so familiar even half-mumbled.

Karl *Jacobs*- the journalist and show runner of *The Late Night Hero* who’d done an interview with him and Dream just *days* before everything went to shit.

The journalist who’d flirted with Sapnap during an entire interview, leaning forward, black painted nails resting on Sapnap’s knee as he struggled to not trip over his words, a secretive smile on his lips-

“Must be quite handy to have access to the majority of the Heroes in the city just by running interviews,” Tommy comments idly, watching the Vigilante with sharp eyes. “Quite the hobby.”

“It’s not always to easy,” Chronos mutters, reaching up to tug his mask off with a wan smile, revealing freckles that makes Tommy’s chest ache. “Most Heroes are cautious enough to not shake hands, especially the sort like Royal whose powers are touch based. It’s taken me years to get where I am today.”

“You can’t be that old,” Tommy says skeptically, running his mind back through the interview. “Dream never shake hands.”

And neither do I.

The fucker had *really* gone and spilled coffee on him the goddamn-

“No, you’re both very troublesome people I’ll have you know,” Chronos sighs, blinking tiredly at him. “My powers work best with bare skin but- things have been off for awhile now and I needed the two of you, as unhelpful as it turned out to be.” He mutters the last bit, rubbing at the side of his head with a grimace. “I’m sorry about the coffee, I was getting desperate.”

“And yet you still decided to seek me out.” Tommy frowns at him and Chronos slides his gaze down and away, one thumb rubbing anxiously against his thigh. “You can’t *see* me, and I’d have known if you pulled that stunt before, so you really know shit all about me.”

“I needed someone close to Dream, someone who could reasonably know something and- your powers, they’re, I mean they’re great, right? I needed someone with a bit of *oomph* because everything points to this being a bit of a shitshow.” Chronos slumps deeper on himself. “I’m not proud of it but you’re in the middle of things, somehow, and Schlatt-“ He grimaces. “I had to warn you from *that* if nothing else.”

“My powers. Right,” Tommy breathes, dragging a hand through his hair beneath his hood and giving it a tug. “What the fuck is up with Schlatt anyway? It’s fucking insanity to challenge *Las Nevadas* of all fucking places.”

“He’s been-“ Chronos’ pupils dilates, breath stuttering in his chest. “He’s been-“

“Stop using your fucking powers,” Tommy growls in annoyance and a flare of ill-ease when the Vigilante’s gaze became vacant for a long moment, blinking back with a startled jerk when Tommy snapped his fingers in front of his face. “Hey-“

“Sorry.” Chronos inhales sharply. “I’m- I’m holding onto too many and it’s- *it’s not fun*, exactly.”

“Can’t you just release some of them?” Tommy wonders, slumping with his chin resting on the back of his seat. “If it’s messing that badly with you.”

“No,” Chronos confesses tiredly. “If I release one I have to release all of them and I can’t- I can’t do that, not when I’m so close to figuring things out.”

“Gonna be hard to help anyone if you’re dead,” Tommy mutters, slumping further, letting himself go boneless. “I’m surprised you didn’t brain yourself into a fucking door last night.”

“I wouldn’t do that,” Chronos denies instantly.

“Sure,” Tommy says with a wrinkle of his nose. “Not like I didn’t watch it happen real time or anything.”

“Shut up.” The Vigilante ducks his head with a defensive hunch of his shoulders. “I *know* what I’m doing.”

“Clearly.”

“Don’t do that.”

“I’m not doing shit.”

“You sound like Jester,” Chronos groans miserably. “He gets all *fussy* on me when I overuse my powers.”

“Comes with the territory, doesn’t it?” Tommy raises a brow. “If you’re fucking *fiancés* or whatever.”

“Don’t remind me.” The Vigilante stares down at the phone, number entered but not dialed.

Inside the front pocket of his coat Slimecicle burrows deeper with a snotty inhalation and Tommy watches with man hesitate, clearly debating with himself, eyes flagging close and mouth thinning.

“Maybe I should call Sapnap instead.”

“He won’t answer from my phone,” Tommy informs him with a shrug when the Vigilante’s gaze snaps to him. “Besides, if I know Sapnap he’ll *absolutely* fuss. Like, that guy goes all mama bear when he thinks someone is being an idiot.”

“Yeah, but he’ll at least let me *explain* things. Maybe.” Chronos grimaces. “Jester thinks I’m an idiot for keeping my powers activated like this.”

“You kinda are though, aren’t you?” Tommy snorts. “You were fucking out of it, man.”

“I don’t want to hear that from a child,” Chronos sighs, tipping back to rest against the seat, staring at the ceiling of the car.

“How did that come about anyway?” Tommy asks after a beat of hesitation. “I mean, Hero, Villain *and* Vigilante? How the fuck does that even *work*?”

“It’s a mess,” Chronos snorts tiredly but there’s something soft in the way his mouth tips up. “But it’s worth it, you know? We make it work. But-“ His brow draws together. “It’s not always easy, I won’t lie, especially between Jester and Sapnap who both have people in their respective, you know-“ He waves his hand. “I work alone, that’s how I’ve always done things, and it’s how I will keep doing things. It’s less complicated that way. It means I have to play the middleman more times than not but-“ He draws a breath. “That’s fine. They’re worth it.”

Tommy grunts noncommittally where he’s slouching.

“I don’t get it,” he admits after a long moment. “Sounds like a fucking disaster in the making.”

Chronos tips his head down, just enough to meet his gaze with a twist of his mouth. “You’re not one of those Heroes who think the Heroes are all *good* and Villains are all *bad*, are you?”

Tommy stares at him.

“I’ve *met* Schlatt, thank you, I’m very well fucking aware shit ain’t as easy as that.” He drags his mouth down, pressing it against the seat. “Things are shit everywhere,” he mumbles. “There’s plenty of Heroes who shouldn’t fucking be in the ranks and the laws around it is shit too, I’m not stupid. I get why people are unhappy with it but that’s what me and Dream are trying to change.”

At least *Tommy* had been.

The thought makes his chest twists uncomfortably.

“There should be more regulations and shit, but it’s a fine fucking line that too because Heroes are humans and we’re treated like commodities. Even our pay is decided by how popular we are.” He stares at the sleeping slime in the Vigilante’s pocket. “It’s strange, you know? To be viewed as *more* than human and then *less* at the same time. Fucking stupid.”

“I guess that’s one way of looking at it,” the Vigilante ventures after a moment with a cough. “I know you and the Syndicate haven’t had the most *pleasant* interactions in the past-“

“I’m not going to them,” Tommy interrupts with a baring of his teeth into an ugly grimace behind his mask. “I don’t know what fucking good you think it will do but *Siren* already decided that he’s *repaid* his debt, favour, fucking *whatever*. They have absolutely zero reason to hear me out.”

His hand drifts down, pressing against his midriff where the Warden’s trident had gone through him, like a bug on a fucking stick, fingers curling to bunch the fabric of his hoodie tight.

“I just need Dream and then everything will be fucking *fine*. I don’t need to go crawling to *them*.”

Chronos slowly raises a hand to squeeze down against the back of his neck, mouth drawn thin, face impossible to read as he stares down at his knees, brow furrowed as he breathes in and out, the lines of his face drawn tight and tense.

“Well, you’re not a Hero anymore *for one*. “

“I’m still loyal to Dream-“

“And what if they were the only way to get to Dream?” the Vigilante cuts him off, raising his head.

Tommy clenches his jaw. “Yeah, well, they’re fucking *not*. “

“But if they *were*,” Chronos pushes. “Would you go to them then?”

Tommy makes a low noise of frustration, metallic and echoing inside his mask. “Why are you so fucking obsessed with them!?” he demands, pinning the Vigilante in place with a glower of blue eyes. “I’ve nearly died several times to several of the members and I can fucking *promise you* it’s not a one-sided thing.”

He laughs without humour, slumping back against the wheel.

“I broke the Angel of Death’s right wing just last year, you know? Snapped it clean and sent us both crashing *quite* spectacularly. Damn near tore up my entire side and nearly brained the guy when I landed on top of him in a fucking *dumpster*. I don’t know how many of the fucker’s feathers I’ve picked out of my back and just two months ago I stabbed him with a *knife* before he dropped me from the fucking sky.” His eyes glitters. “I’ve broken Siren’s jaw on at least two occasions because the fucker won’t shut up otherwise, and he’s shot me at least twice as many times in return. There’s no love fucking lost between us I can assure you.”

Because if there’s one Villains whose powers terrifies the shit out of him it’s *Siren* and Tommy wants nothing to do with him, wants nothing to do with any of them.

He’d helped the Blood God because the world is crap and he couldn’t just leave the man to bleed out in a fucking alley way but that’s the extent of it. Tommy owes them *nothing* and Red Chaos owes them even less.

He snaps his jaw in frustration.

“I don’t care if the world views me as a Hero or not, I’ve only ever been *Dream*’s that that’s what I’ll continue to be once this shitshow is over.” He meets the Vigilante’s gaze. “*That’s* why I’m here. Because Red Chaos was made to stand by his side, to have his back so that he could change shit and make things *better*.”

“For *who*?” Chronos challenges as Tommy clenches his jaw. “The Syndicate want things to be better as well, you know?” His tone lowers, softer, more urgent. “Look, you just have different ways of going about the same thing if you think about it-“

“I don’t *care*,” Tommy cuts him off roughly, shoulders wiring tight as he folds on himself. “I don’t want to hear it alright so fucking *lay off it*. I don’t even know you! Who are you to ask anything from me, huh!?” he hisses. “I’m trying my fucking best just to figure out what the hell is going on with *Dream* and you’re gonna drag me into your fucking mess too? *Fuck off*. I can’t- I can’t fucking do it so find someone else to do your dirty work!”

“You’re not *listening*,” Chronos says with frustration, pale, perspiration on his brow and a shiver running through him. “You need people in your corner-“

“I just need Dream,” Tommy cuts him off, fingers burrowing tight into the fabric of his hoodie. “Dream will make everything alright. He’ll have a solution, he’ll know what to do-“

“Dream has been meeting with Schlatt!” Chronos lurches forward, one hand slamming down and grabbing hard onto the back of the drivers seat as he bared his mouth in a grimace. “Whatever he’s involved in isn’t so simple that you can just *waltz in there* and expect things to be okay-“

“I fucking know that!” Tommy snarls. “I’m not stupid! I fucking know something is *wrong*-“

“*No*,” Chronos shakes his head. “No you *don’t* get it and that’s the problem!”

“Then stop being so fucking cryptic about it!” Tommy bites out, heart pounding and fury pulsing alongside frustration in his veins as he glowers at the Vigilante.

“I can’t because I don’t know what’s going on!” Chronos groans, slumping forward to press his brow against the seat, a shiver running through him. “I’m trying, I’m trying, I’m trying but I can’t put it together because it’s all so messed up in my brain and it’s-“ He laughs, wet and slightly hysterical. “I can’t turn to Jester or Sapnap because they won’t understand, they won’t understand, and now all I have is *you*. I’ve pushed all my limits, I’m tired, I’m tired, I’m tired-“

Tommy’s breath rasps thickly with the rise and fall of his chest, the tension in his shoulders slowly slipping out, leaving something hollow in its place as he stares at the Vigilante who hunches on himself, burrowing his face into his hands as he shudders, muttering the same words over and over again.

And you don’t think I am? Tommy thinks with vitriol and spite that bubbles and crawls up his throat before he swallows thickly, forcing it down.

“As Heroes, we sometimes just have to suck it up,” Dream laughs, an ugly sound that echoes as he presses his palm against his thigh where blood is spreading dark and wet. *“We have more important things to deal with than worrying about dying of all things.”*

Tommy is tired of not understanding what’s going on.

He’s so goddamn *fucking tired*.

“Chronos.” The Vigilante makes no motion of having heard him, still repeating the same mantra, gasping and tripping over the words, and Tommy frowns, shifting hesitantly to lean towards him. “Karl? Hey-“ He reaches out, grasping tight to a cold wrist and forcing it down.

His freezes, staring at the hazy glow of white eyes, blood trailing down pale freckled cheeks that slowly rises to look through him.

“I don’t feel so good,” Karl laughs wetly, a tear spilling to bleed pink amidst the red. “I don’t- I don’t feel very good at *all*.“

Chapter End Notes

Ayup my dudes! Welcome back to another chapter of Hush Now :)

In honour of hitting 8k kudos I've started up a discord server for Hush Now so- if you guys are interested in that, here's a link [Hush Now Discord](#)

There's a discussion channel for Hush in general, and one for the newest chapter, so keep an eye on that if you want to avoid spoilers and be mindful of each other, alright?

And if there's any issue don't be afraid to reach out - I'm still working out the kinks of it to make sure it's all good vibes.

If you don't wanna hang out on discord you can also find me on tumblr [corpse-art](#) so feel free to swing by there :) I usually let people know around an hour in advance before a new chapter gets dropped if you're interested in that kind of thing.

I've also sorted out the issue with my end notes just *not* allowing me to just link all the fanart you guys have made for Hush Now. So- I'm gonna post a link to the master post where I've collected them on tumblr, as well as separate links to any new art that has appeared between one chapter and the next.

There's also fanart channel on discord where I've pinned them up and you'll find them under "hush now fanart" on my tumblr :)

That aside, hi, hello, our boy is really going through it and life ain't easy.

Not to say that Karl's having a terrible fun time.

Sending you all good vibes, you're all amazing :) I keep reading and rereading your comments and looking at the art and it's just- it's rather overwhelming tbh but in the best kind of way, you know? You bring me so much joy.

-

THAT SAID, welcome to some absolutely fabulous art, go and give them some love<3

[Tommy hauling Chronos by eelsdancingonpluto](#)

[FANART MASTERPOST](#)

Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Fuck, fuck, fuck, *fuck*-“ Tommy drags the Vigilante out of the car, lowering him down to prop him against the back wheel of the car, eyes staring blankly out ahead as Tommy grabbed his chin, using his sleeve to roughly swipe away at the blood running down his cheeks, only succeeding in smearing it roughly. “What the fuck, man, you can’t just fucking-“

He catches himself, draws a breath and then releases it roughly.

Tommy presses his fingers against Chronos' neck, closing his eyes as he counted the beat of his heart, still too fast, working frantic inside his chest.

Dilated pupils, cold skin, eyes fucking *glowing*-

“You need to cut your fucking powers,” Tommy growls, leaning closer, fingers digging hard into the skin of the Vigilante’s chin. “Hey- I’m fucking talking to you!” He snaps his fingers in front of eyes that doesn’t as much as flutter, wide open, unblinking and hazed out as they flickered oddly.

Tommy scrubs a hand roughly his hair, hoodie falling back as he tipped his head, staring up at the blue sky above them.

His own heart beat thrums in his chest as he straightens out, taking a step forward and leaning into the car where Slimecicle is peeling himself back into human shape from where Tommy had thrown him unceremoniously against the window.

“That was rude,” Slimecicle informs him with small arms folding across his chest as he dribbles down with a small *splat* against the seat, and Tommy has a brief moment of being fucking *thankful* it’s not his car. “You can just go around throwing people, man.”

“You-“ Tommy forces his mouth into a grimace behind the mask before he breathed out. “Tell Jester I’m calling him.”

Slimecicle tilts his head. “He says he’s busy.”

“Tell him to fucking *unbusy* himself,” Tommy growls as he spies his phone discarded beneath the front seat and stretches down to snap it up. “His fiancé is crying blood. There- tell him *that*.”

The number is still on the screen and he doesn’t allow himself to second guess his decision as he presses down on the green call button and raises it up.

Jester answers before it hits the second dial tone.

“What the fuck do you mean with he’s crying blood?” The Villain snaps out with tension that makes Tommy’s shoulders go rigid, jaw clenching tight. *“You better not have-“*

“He’s overused his powers,” Tommy interrupts him as he reaches out to snag hold of the slime who flails, wide-eyed until Tommy shoves him onto his shoulder, ducking out of the car. “What’s his limit?”

“What-“ There’s a sound of the speaker being muffled, someone swearing, a tense command being snapped out before Jester’s voice once again appeared- *“Two weeks,”* the Villain snaps out impatiently. *“You better not be fucking with me Red or we’re going to have bad blood, you hear me?”*

Tommy barely registers the words, staring at the Vigilante who shivers in the snow.

“He-“ Tommy drags a hand over his face. “He told me he’s been having them activated for two *months*.”

Jester, whose shoes had been clacking obnoxiously with his quick steps, stills on the other side of the phone.

“You’re fucking with me.” And- there’s something other than anger now, in the heavy but slow breaths of the Villain. *“There’s no way-“*

“That’s what he told me,” Tommy cuts him off rudely, but he can’t find it in himself to care as he sinks to his knees in the snow. “His eyes are fucking glowing and there’s just- blood, running down his cheek like some horror movie shit. He was talking and then he just- blanked out, fuck if I know.”

“Of course he’s-“ Jester cuts himself off with a laugh, but there’s no humour in the harsh sound, the speaker once again muffled, and Tommy’s fingers taps restlessly against the casing of the phone as he uses his free hand to wipe away from blood on Chronos’ cheeks, grimacing. *“Where are you?”* Jester demands abruptly, all business.

Tommy only hesitates for a beat before he gives him the closest thing to an approximate location he *can* and Jester breathes in.

“I’m- fuck, I’m too far away-“ He cuts himself off and Tommy’s brow furrows. *“I’m sending someone to you,”* Jester says abruptly. *“Just- stay right where you are and they’ll be with you. I’m trusting you here, Red. You make sure Chronos is safe, you hear me?”*

“You’re sending someone from the Syndicate,” Tommy grits out.

Jester lets out a short laugh. *“Yeah,”* he agrees. *“I am.”*

“I don’t-“

“You wouldn’t leave a Vigilante all alone to a group of Villains, would you, Red?” Jester cuts him off, tone low and so friendly that Tommy feels a shiver crawl up his back. *“Look- they won’t hurt either of you, I have enough favours to call on to make sure of that, but until I get*

there I'd prefer it if you'd do me a favour and stick around." There's a pause. *"I'd owe you one."*

"Why me?" Tommy forces out. "It's not like I can do shit about any of this."

"You stood against the man you owe your loyalty to protect someone who is your enemy."
Tommy can hear the clack of the Villain's fancy shoes against marble flooring. *"Swear to me you'll keep him safe, Red Chaos."*

And-

Tommy looks at Chronos, at *Karl*, who sit half-slumped against his stolen car, in the snow with blood that spills from his eyes to drip from his chin, eyes glowingly dimly, the result of pushing his powers past reason.

Chronos had reached out to him.

Had pinned his hopes on a Hero. Former Hero. Whatever the *fuck* he's supposed to be now.

Someone who can't even access his powers.

"I'll keep him safe." Tommy's hand circles his right wrist, clenching down tight. "And you won't owe me *shit* for it."

-

Tommy finds a thick blanket with sand clinging to it in the trunk of the car and shakes it out before bundling the Vigilante tight in the backseat and strapping him in.

There's a first aid kit that he can do shit with, a half-empty bottle of vodka that he shifts into the glove compartment, and old paper cups of coffee that he sorts into a pile before closing the trunk shut.

He checks the gas, turns the heat on as high as he dares, and after a moment of deliberation switches on the radio, flicking through the channels until he finds soft piano music and leaves it there.

With nothing else to distract himself he hauls himself up on the hood of the car after dusting the night's snowfall off it, leaning back on his palms as he stares up at the sky, at the clouds and the sun barely visible behind them.

There's tension in his shoulder, in his jaw that won't relax no matter how he tries to work it loose behind his mask, beanie once again in place and hoodie tugged up.

"He'll be okay," Slimecicle says, tone upbeat where he's running goopy fingers through an escaped curl of blond hair behind Tommy's ear. "Someone will come to help! Jester said so."

"Did he tell you *who*?" Tommy asks roughly.

Slimecicle shakes his head, finally releasing his hair and instead grabbing onto the lobe of his ear, hoisting himself into the small space and tucking himself tight against the side of his neck with a small content sound. “He said he’s very busy and that someone will be here.”

“Still sorting out the mess from last night no doubt,” Tommy snorts, doing his best not to cringe at the feeling of slime dripping down his neck.

He pushes up to slump forward, pawing at his pocket to pull up his phone, frowning down at it.

It takes him only a moment to pull up last night’s happenings, Las Nevadas trending alongside his and Schlatt’s name, and he flicks through bold headlines until he finds a video that had been snagged up by several media stations.

He drags the small round dot half-way into the video and releases it-

“- never seen anything like it!”

He tunes out the reporter, turning his phone on the side and letting the video full screen as Slimecicle shifted forward to peer curiously down alongside him.

The sight of Jester on the stairs of Las Nevadas is a blurry thing, cards glowing blue where they circle around him, hands spread out and tension clear in the lines of his body as Schlatt slowly climbed to his feet, one hand raising to wipe something from his mouth-

The statue behind Schlatt shivers and shakes and the phone filming the happenings are abruptly jerked aside and then up, scrambling back as an enormous golden foot suddenly rose from the ground, stepping down with a shaking step, eyes opening and glowing a bright livid green as *life* bled into it.

Gold smoothing out into something not quite *human* as two long arms stretched out and up into the sky, fingers weaving together with an arch of a golden spine as the Golden Man of Las Nevadas stepped into the playing field with a spreading grin on his face.

“What the *fuck*, ” Tommy breathes, staring at the lava that that glowed bright as Schlatt traded his whip in favour of drawing on the full force of his powers-

He drags the video forward, working through it quickly with the zipping blue lights of the cards Jester slung at Schlatt with flicks of his fingers, only pausing to press down at the deck of cards strapped to his belt to summon new ones, an unmovable force in front of the entrance to Las Nevadas.

There are more Heroes than Schlatt that Tommy recognizes and he frowns, pausing the video to roll it back, bringing the screen closer and-

“That’s Punz.” Ill-ease threads through him. “Why the fuck would *Punz* be with Schlatt.”

Because it’s undeniably him.

White hoodie with heavy armour and a wrap of golden chain that spans out from the middle of his chest and around him, framing the green glowing eye that rests above his heart.

The Eye of Ender.

It was said that Punz used it to hunt people down.

For the right price.

Punz wasn't *exactly* recognizable to the public. The only reason Tommy knew of the man was because *George* of all fucking people had gotten into trouble with an associate of his during one of his hacking escapades.

Even Dream hadn't known much about him before that, only faint rumours that blossomed in The Pit.

Tommy had been watching from an alcove above as Dream and George met with the mercenary and he's *pretty sure* Dream had paid a heavy sum of money to clear that whole fuck-up.

Punz wasn't exactly good news. Punz and *Schlatt* was an even worse combination.

"I know him!" Slimecicle perks up on his shoulder. "Jester doesn't like him."

"People like Punz doesn't exactly make *friends*," Tommy huffs. "He's loyal to *no one*. All he cares about is money."

"I'm not surprised to hear you dislike him," a voice comments and Tommy jerks, zeroing on the figure that sits with a hand resting on the trunk of the tree beside them, ankles crossed beneath the branch, and *when the fuck*- "He's the opposite of everything you stand for, isn't he, Red Chaos?"

"*Nemesis*," Tommy bites out, tension rippling down his spine as he turns the screen of his phone off, heart pounding inside his chest as he tips his head. "You're the one Jester sent?"

"I had the time to spare," *Nemesis* comments, shifting to clasp her hands in her lap as she leant forward to meet his gaze. "And a bit of a personal investment, if you will."

Wrapped in a blue cloak with golden trim, small in stature, boots thick on her feet and a mask that glitters with the cast of light on the shimmering scales that frames her blue eyes.

Tommy had heard the laughter, the ribbing that happened when another Hero had gone up against her only to come back soaking wet to the tower with their dignity torn to shreds.

Underestimated because she was a woman in the fold of the Syndicate.

Tommy's first meeting with her had left him a half-drowned miserable heap and he's well-aware of how easily she could have killed him right there and then, powerless to do anything against the water that pulsed and squeezed around him, crushing against his ribs and lungs

struggling to hold onto what miserable little air he'd managed to catch before it wrapped around him.

Nemesis is dangerous. That she had a low kill count had nothing to do with whatever perceived ideas of *weakness* Heroes and the media had.

She chose not to kill as often or as bloody as other members in the Syndicate but that didn't mean she *hadn't*.

Drowning wasn't a flashy kill.

It was an easy enough kill to cover up, however, and that, if anything, was something to be wary of.

Her mouth curls, pink lips with a peek of white teeth. "I'm here on Jester's behalf. He called in a pretty favour from me to make sure I got both you and Chronos to where you need to be."

"And where is that?" Tommy asks warily, eyes on the water slowly wrapping up the trunk of the tree to flatten out beneath her.

Nemesis slides easily from the branch, landing with barely a ripple before it carried her down to the ground where she stepped off.

She ignores him.

"Hello Charlie," she greets, voice softening as the slime stuck his head out to wave happily at her. "I heard you were out on an adventure."

"I am!" The slime smiles widely. "I don't think Chronos is having a very fun time though."

She hums. "That's why I'm here."

There's a wrap of black around her neck, one of the more discrete voice changers he'd seen in the business, flat and wrapped in a layer that made it waterproof.

Dream had stolen a broken one from Royal to study and adapt for something of his own and it changed his mentor's voice *just enough* that Tommy had gotten a whiplash the first time he heard the wheezing laughter run through it.

His mentor kept it beneath the fold of the black turtleneck he wore beneath his hoodie but kept it mostly off during missions.

Tommy says nothing, turning his attention to his phone and the paused video that opens on the screen with a press of his thumb, pretending not to feel the way her eyes lingers on him for a moment longer before turning her attention to the Vigilante passed out in the backseat.

"Your return came as quite as a surprise," Nemesis says as she pulls the door open. "Two months is a long time to disappear in our business."

“I’ve been busy,” Tommy bites out, backspacing from the video to scroll down, ignoring the bolded headlines of his Hero name and looking for anything of interest in relation to Schlatt.

Nemesis hums, a contrastingly soft sound, and when he glances at her she’s got one knee on the seat, leaning forward with her hand pressing against the side of the Vigilante’s face to angle his face towards her.

“Chronos?” Care, at least some level of it.

Tommy bites down on the inside of his cheek.

“I know his civilian name,” Tommy finds himself saying, watching as Nemesis pauses. “I’m not gonna do anything about it, before you ask, just- he responds better to it than Chronos.” He shifts uncomfortably. “I don’t think he really remembers that he *is* Chronos.”

He really has no idea if Nemesis knows his civilian name but-

“Karl.” Chronos jerks, a small thing with a shiver that runs through his body where Tommy can see him through the windscreen. “Karl, can you look at me, please?”

Tommy tunes them out, one hand drifting down to tap his thumb restlessly against the side of his leg as he breathes in and then out, chest expanding and then lowering, slow, rhythmic, a forced calm that Dream had taught him early.

He can almost feel the warmth of Dream’s palm against his spine, coaching him through it as he stares blankly at the snow.

“You’re gonna be in high-stress situations but you can’t let it get to your head, okay Tommy? Focus on your breathing. If your body thinks you’re calm your head will follow so- just keep breathing.”

Tommy wonders what Dream would have to say if he could see him now, where he sits, Nemesis just a step away, about to go fucking *somewhere* with her while dragging a half-delirious Vigilante he feels vaguely responsible for.

He grimaces behind his mask, shifting and reaching up to scratch absently at his shoulder, rolling them to try and work out some of the tension.

The thing is- Tommy is used to playing high-risk games.

He’s just not used to playing them on his own.

He breathes out, frustration wiring through him alongside something sharp and prickling that makes his fingers twitch before he shifts to push off the car, snow crunching beneath his boots.

“We have to move, right?” he asks abruptly as Nemesis straightens out and peers towards him. “Unless you know how to force someone to cut off their power.”

“We have to move,” she acknowledges with a look he can’t read as he opens the driver door and leans his arm down on it with a slight slouch. “How long has he been like this?”

He shrugs. “He took a fucking nap, was coherent, went like this, and I called Jester.”

Nemesis slides the door shut. “Most would hesitate before calling their enemy.”

“Would you rather I ditched his fucking body in the woods?” Tommy challenges with a snort. “Besides, Jester already knew he was with me. Would have been a bit hard to explain Chronos suddenly going missing.”

“People go missing every day,” Nemesis says with a hum as she steps closer towards him and he straightens up, keeping eye contact as she pauses beside him, heel lowering as she tilted her head. “You’ve caused quite the riot. Your name is on everybody’s lips, speculations going hot. *Hero or Villain?*” Her voice lowers. “*Perhaps something in-between?*”

Tommy gives her a dull look. “Who even *cares?*”

“That’s a very un-Heroic thing to say.” Her voice curls around the words, blue eyes studying him. “Most Heroes are pretty attached to their title.”

“I’m *Dream’s*.” He clenches his jaw. “I don’t give a *fuck* about what the *world* brands me with.”

Because *Dream is* his world and Tommy doesn’t give a shit about what anyone else thinks him to be.

Something flickers in her eyes.

“So you say.” She’s moving before he has time to register the words, stepping past him to circle the car for the passenger seat with calm steps and barely a sound.

A quiet kind of danger.

Tommy yanks the driver’s door open and slips inside, power dampener pulsing hot against his wrist as he twists the wires together, car rumbling to life with tension running tight through his shoulders.

I’m really doing this.

Tommy looks at the rearview mirror, at the Vigilante in the backseat who blinks blearily back, eyes flickering.

I’m doing this, he thinks more firmly as he grabs the steering wheel and shifts the gear stick into drive.

He’d sworn to save lives and if this is the only way to help Chronos-

Then he’s just going to have to fucking *deal* and hope Jester wasn’t in the mood to screw him over.

-

"Being a Hero is about making the right choice, even when it terrifies you, even when you know you might not come out of things alive."

Tommy stares blearily at his mentor, small breaths puffing against the oxygen mask over his face.

He's fourteen.

He can't stop thinking about the cold eyes of the Warden, tall and broad, towering above him as his breath stuttered and wheezed, blood bubbling thick up his throat to pool on the inside of his mask as he coughed, fingers cold and trembling and covered in his own blood they wrapped slick around the trident in a futile attempt to *get it out of him*.

"I know- I know it might not mean much." Dream's hands squeezes around his where it lies limp on the covers, hooked up on enough drugs that he can barely feel his body at all. *"But I'm proud of you, Tommy."*

"I lost." His tongue wraps clumsily around the words. *"I-"*

"You lived," Dream interrupts him. *"You fought and you lived. There's no shame in losing because not every fight will be a win. Sometimes all we can do is get up and try again."* His mentor draws a sharp breath. *"I should have gotten there sooner. If anything- this is my fault."*

But it's not, Tommy had wanted to say. *The only thing I did right today was protecting you.*

"Go to sleep," Dream tells him softly as his eyes flutters, struggling to keep them open as his mentor reaches over to up the drug dosage. *"We'll talk more when you're feeling better, alright?"*

-

"Take a left here," Nemesis tells him and Tommy clenches his teeth but obliges, turning the wheel with a flick of his eyes to the closest sign, mentally keeping track of where they were as the buildings crawled past them.

They're still far away from the Hero tower, closer to the outer districts of L'Manberg where the buildings were harried, uncared for, Hero patrols much less common.

There's a reason the tower stands in the heart of L'Manberg, where the rich and famous has their homes, restaurants serving food covered with golden leaves and where champagne comes in fancy bottles at ridiculous prices.

Tommy had made it an early mission to donate all his money to charities, he had no interest or need for the amount that had racked up in his savings.

Hero work was all about getting the right sponsorships and his association with Dream had brought in more gold in a day than he'd ever seen in his *life*.

He was happy having enough for his apartment, for food, for necessities in work, but anything sentimental he had were things that had been given to him.

Hoodies snuck into his drawers and desk, beneath is pillow, chunked at him unexpectedly with Dream disappearing before he had time to as much get it off his face and protest, face red as he was left clutching it with white knuckles and a strange feeling bubbling in his chest.

“The parking garage on the right.”

Tommy focuses on his breathing, wheel turning and metal rattling as the garage door started moving, slowly opening up to let them inside.

He slows the car to a crawl, headlights shining bright in the darkness before flicking off as he came to a halt and reached beneath the wheel to kill the car.

“There,” he says tensely, twitching as Nemesis opened her door and slipped out.

He copies her, Slimecicle humming curiously as he stuck his head out of his hoodie to peer around with wide eyes.

“Can you carry him?” Nemesis asks as Tommy opens the back door of the car. “There’s a bit of a walk.”

Tommy would rather have his hands *free* fucking *thank you*.

But he bites the response crawling up his throat down and reaches down over the Vigilante to release his seatbelt, nudging carefully at him to get an arm around his back and then other beneath his knees before pulling him out and up.

Chronos makes a low noise of protest, head rolling and body turning to burrow against him, and Tommy nearly falters, neck prickling uncomfortably as he stares down at the man.

He blows out a breath and kicks the door shut before turning to Nemesis who is already moving away, towards the elevator and bypassing it for the stairs as Tommy lengthens his steps to catch up to her.

“Who are we meeting anyway?” he asks tensely as he follows at her heels, Vigilante in his arms and slime humming something upbeat and off-key on his shoulder.

“You’ll see when we get there.”

Nemesis’ cape swishes at her ankles and he finds himself studying the intricate golden webbing of the trim, at the mark that centers at her back in the same fine threading as they move down spiraling stairs, far deeper than a normal garage would take them.

His heart beats in his chest and he tightens his hold on Chronos who groans miserable, hair clinging to a brow wet with sweat, his breathing small puffs of hurried air, eyes casting a low light against the dark red of his hoodie.

Side-effects of powers aren't exactly *rare*. Tommy's seen his fair deal of people who's pushed their powers too far.

Sapnap's skin would burn so hot that he couldn't be touched, blood bubbling and fizzling where it spilled against the ground from his nose with a grimace, and George's dragged him into an unwilling deep sleep he couldn't be awoken from until it had run through him, sleep spores clinging to his hair and clogging his breath.

Some were worse than others and he'd seen downright violent ones where the backlash was extreme with deadly consequences.

"Do you think he'll be alright?" he finds himself asking and there's a brief pause in the steady gait of the Villain in-front of him, barely noticeable, before she found her rhythm again. "I don't really get how his powers work in the first place," he continues stubbornly when she doesn't answer, "but if he's seeing possible decisions and stuff that means it's his brain being put under pressure, right?"

Nemesis slows her steps and Tommy finds himself trotting beside her, shoulders wired tight, her blue eyes regarding him for a long moment before she focused ahead.

"What Chronos sees are the *possible decisions* of those he's connected too. That means that not everything he sees is *true* or *will happen*. What he sees is also influenced by how much emotions are connected to the decision in itself and helps him sort out the important decisions from the choice between strawberry or blueberry jam." Her mouth thins with consideration. "It does put a lot of strain on him when he upholds too many connections for too long and that creates a feedback backlash which is responsible for the state he is in now."

He blinks at her in surprise.

"I don't know why Chronos sought you out in the first place," Nemesis continues steadily. "But while what he sees isn't necessarily clear or true there's *something* that would have pushed him into this state. I've only seen it happen once before, and it nearly killed him, but also saved Jester's life."

That- was more information that Tommy had expected and his brow furrows.

"I see," he settles on, deciding to think about it more *later* when he wasn't deep in some strange underground Villain hide-out.

She gives him a brief unreadable look. "It's curious," she says and his neck prickles. "Out of all people he sought *you* out so the question is what have you gotten yourself into? And *who* will pay the price for it?"

"What's that supposed to mean?" he snaps, fingers curling white knuckled into the coat of the Vigilante.

"You Heroes have little regard for those around you, always wrapped up on your petty problems," Nemesis' tone is a challenge that makes his jaw clench tight enough that he feels his teeth gnash together. "You're a walking evidence of that, aren't you?"

“Oh *fuck off*,” Tommy growls. “I could say the exact same thing about the Syndicate and I wouldn’t be *wrong*. ”

Nemesis hums. “The government is not perfect, denying it would be naivety.” Her steps are silent, sure, but there’s no arrogance in the lines of her shoulder or voice, just a quiet sort of self-assurance. “It’s a system of corruption implemented and rooted deep to control people from the moment they’re born and it needs to change or be destroyed completely. But you Heroes uphold that system, feverishly so.”

Which- yeah, she’s not *wrong*.

It’s what he and Dream had been striving towards, after all. To bring change to the Hero system, to challenge ideas of morality and show other Heroes that just because it had been one way forever it didn’t need to *stay that way*.

But where Dream had chosen to lead by example the Syndicate had only upped the violence, other Villains rising in their path, following by example to the cost of life on both sides.

Because the Heroes had responded in turn, escalating it, and Tommy had watched Dream’s frustration and powerlessness in the face of it with a helpless sort of feeling wiring tight around his heart.

“L’Manberg... you know, this is something I’ve talked to you about before- that the goal has always been to have this one united city, where everyone follows the same rules, no opposite countries, there’s no, you know, any of this... there’s just one giant family.”

Bright green eyes, one hand curling around the railing of the balcony, the wind tugging at the short wavy strands of his hair as he stared out over the streets of L’Manberg.

Dream’s ambition had always been naïve, Tommy knows that, but he’d wanted to believe it all the same.

His mentor made him *want* to believe that it was possible.

Made him *want* to believe that there’s enough good in the world to get even a step closer to something like it.

A world where being a hybrid didn’t mean facing discrimination, where powers weren’t either revered or feared, those born with them treated as something otherly and wrong or raised to the sky, celebrated and burdened all at once with the mantel of Heroism.

Where mistakes weren’t treated like a death sentence, the walls of Pandora housing innocent people whose powers had taken them by surprise and then deemed them too dangerous to be allowed out in society, locked up inside walls that robbed and starved them of all that they were.

Where being born poor wasn’t a death sentence and the rich didn’t hoard their gold with glimmering eyes and the toasting of too expensive wine.

“And what then?” Tommy bites out. “You tear it all down and leave people with *nothing*? People need safety and security, needs to know that there’s something to come back to, something to strive towards and to protect.” Slimecicle presses a gentle palm against his neck, cold and slick beneath his ear. “You can’t just tear it all down and pretend that people aren’t going to be wanting *revenge*. It’s just violence breeding violence.”

The world isn’t black and white, Tommy knows that.

Knows that what he and Dream are doing, *had been doing*, could have amounted to nothing at all.

But he’d seen the change, in other Heroes who strove to copy the spirit Dream had brought to the ranks after claiming the Number One Spot, and he’d dared to *hope*.

And now he stands with nothing but the frantic beating of his heart and a loyalty he clings tooth and nail too because if Dream had been wrong, if Dream had abandoned it all, where did that leave *Tommy*?

Eight years.

A hand reaching out and Tommy reaching back, grasping it tight, the one sure thing he had in a world that had left something ugly in his soul.

“Perhaps,” Nemesis says noncommittally. “But where does it leave us if we don’t try at all?”

Nowhere, Tommy thinks but does not say as he focuses his gaze ahead.

Doing nothing is the same as giving up, after all, and Tommy refuses to do just that.

-

Nemesis pushes up an old green door, shifting to hold it open as Tommy forced himself to take one step after the other, boots echoing with the additional weigh of the Vigilante despite his best effort.

It makes him horribly aware of his own existence as Nemesis tips her head meaningfully before turning and-

The Angel of Death tilts his head, bird like where he sits on the arm of a plush green couch that looked like it had seen better days, the light in the room dim and yet- there’s a gleam and sheen to his feathers, dark and dangerous behind the Syndicate leader.

Blue eyes glitters as they meet his and Tommy comes to a forceful halt.

“*Red Chaos*,” the Angel’s mouth wraps meaningfully around his name. “Fancy seeing you here, mate.”

“I’m just here for him,” Tommy forces out, hostility rising sharp and hot with a prickling burn of the power dampener. “Jester said you could fix him.”

“That’s one way to put it.” A hand beckons him, gleaming wickedly with sharp black talons that had nearly succeeded in tearing him open, the scars thick on his chest. “Don’t be shy,” the Villain says with a mocking kind of gentleness when Tommy’s shoulders draw uncomfortably tight. “Jester called more than one favour tonight to make sure you both leave in one piece.”

“*Three* in fact,” another voice drawls, low and dark, and Tommy has a sinking feeling that bubbles with something hysterical as he slowly turns his head to meet blood red eyes. “So why don’t you have a seat, little Hero.” Head tilting, tusks large and gleaming with the gold that circles them. “If you can even be called *that* anymore.”

The door slides shut behind him, heavy and metallic and final.

Chapter End Notes

Well. Huh.

How it goes.

Welcome back to this my guys! What a show we've gotten around to.

Tommy- yeah. Our boi might be in a spot of trouble. Just a smidge. Just a *pinch*.

I'm sending all my love and appreciation to you guys, it's such a fun adventure to be on together and I'm so glad you're all enjoying Hush Now :)

-

In honour of hitting 8k kudos I've started up a discord server for Hush Now so- if you guys are interested in that, here's a link [Hush Now Discord](#)

There's a discussion channel for Hush in general, and one for the newest chapter, so keep an eye on that if you want to avoid spoilers and be mindful of each other, alright? And if there's any issue don't be afraid to reach out - my mods and I are still working out the kinks of it to make sure it's all good vibes.

If you don't wanna hang out on discord you can also find me on tumblr [corpse-art](#) so feel free to swing by there :) I usually let people know around an hour in advance before a new chapter gets dropped if you're interested in that kind of thing.

-

DUDES. We have a ton of Hush Now art and I'm just shfk pls. Its amazing. You're alla amazing. Go and give them some love<3

[Chronos by lun-ar-tra-sh](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[Painting Together by kathyrealmstales](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[Quackity of Las Nevadas by kathyrealmstales](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[FANART MASTERPOST](#)

Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

There's a reason Red Chaos falters where Tommy doesn't.

The stakes are different in the games of Heroes and Villains, and where his civilian identity offers even a pretense of protection there's nothing for him where he stands, Vigilante in arm and Jester's small spy pressed close beneath his ear.

There's just a strange dissonance, a buzzing fury and reminder of his own weakness as he stares into eyes bright and glowing red.

The Blood God sits sprawled back, arms spread over the back of the couch and one leg thrown up over the other knee, crown golden and jutting up in a row of delicate sharp points where it sits slanted on his head, skin just a shade lighter pink than the hair that spills down his back, broad and impossibly tall.

The boar mask ends beneath his nose, leaving his mouth proudly on display, arrogant and sure with the stretch of his lips.

"Well?" The Blood God challenges, a rough drawl that makes the hair on his arms rise. "Are you just going to stand there all day? We have better things to do than entertain little lost Heroes."

I stitched you up in my apartment, Tommy thinks dully, something withering strange in his chest the longer he holds the Villain's gaze. *I could have left you for the Heroes to take in, but I didn't.*

You'd be locked up in Pandora if it wasn't for me.

"I'm only here for Chronos," Tommy forces out, tearing his gaze away to meet that of the Angel's. "He overused his powers and he's completely out of it."

He takes a step forward, and then another.

"Don't let them see your fear, Tommy." Dream's voice is an echo in the back of his mind, flashing lights and hungry gazes waiting behind a stretch of a red curtain, young, only fourteen, and about to make his first public appearance as Red Chaos. *"They'll sink their claws in into any perceived weakness."*

It feels like a lifetime ago, the anxiety thrumming like the wings of a humming bird inside his chest, afraid of screwing up, of saying the wrong thing, of doing *anything* that would make Dream look bad.

The silence is a comforting thing he turns to more than once during the years, content to leave the talking to his mentor, only stepping up when he felt he needed to, there to draw the

attention off Dream for just a beat, a breath, allowing his mentor to reevaluate the situation and come back stronger and surer.

They'd eaten it up every time, desperate for even a whisper from him, and Tommy had been careful to play the card, keeping it tucked close to his chest.

The Angel shifts, head tipping curiously to regard him with glittering eyes as one hand extended out to gesture to the couch he sits on with a spread of dark talons, and Tommy cautiously lowers Chronos down on it, the muscles along his spine drawing tight as the Angel leans closer, angling to peer at the red that drips and stains the Vigilante's pale face, his breathing harsh and stuttering.

The room is dim, concrete walls and hanging lamps that's seen better days, cold creeping and wrapping around him as he takes a single step back, drawing up to his full height, straightening out as he stays by Chronos side, mouth flat beneath his mask and eyes watchful as talons curled to tilt the Vigilante's chin up.

"How long did he say he'd had them activated?"

"Two months," Tommy bites out, neck prickling uncomfortably at the lingering gaze of the Blood God behind him.

He shifts, a careful thing that angles him to watch the Angel and keep an eye on the Blood God from the corner of his vision.

The Villain hums, the mask on his face leaving little tells, the green and white striped bucket hat pulled low to shadow his eyes as the tip of one of one talon taps against the soft throat of Chronos who stares blindly up with hazy eyes.

"So, *Dream's mutt*, you made quite the return." The Blood God's voice is a drawl, chin lowering with a baring of his tusks. "It makes me wonder what's so interesting about you that Schlatt would be foolish enough to challenge Las Nevadas for just a chance to get his hands on you."

"I think he's made his intentions quite clear," Tommy tilts his head, meeting red eyes with a hooded blue. "One just has to watch the news."

"Hah!" The loud disbelieving sound makes him twitch, brows drawing together and jaw clenching. "I think we both know there's more to it than that." The Blood God's heavy boot hits the ground, languid as he shifts to lean forward, elbows on his knees and hands loose as he bares his teeth. "You're keeping secrets."

"Believe whatever you want," Tommy forces out, frustration wiring tight even as he shoves at it because he *really fucking can't afford to piss the Villains off without his powers*. "Schlatt plays his own games, I hate the guy."

"Oh? Drama in the ranks of Heroes?"

Tommy gives him a deeply unimpressed look and the Villain laughs, gravelly and higher than he'd expected.

"I don't see anyway around it than cutting his powers." Tommy turns his full attention back on the Angel whose wings stretches with a ruffle of soft looking feathers before folding back as he slipped off the armrest with barely a sound.

"You can do that?" Tommy asks warily, flicking his gaze down to the Vigilante as he groans, one hand pawing weakly with a shuddering sound and a soft complaint, his glowing gaze searching restlessly and Tommy's mouth dips down before he looks up. "With what? Obsidian?"

"Would take too much time," the Angel comments evasively as he pulls a phone from his pocket, boots soft against the ground as he made his way to the backdoor of the room. "I'll make a call, you two *play nice*." He gestures for Nemesis to follow him and she does so with a turn of her boots, a silent shadow in his path.

Tommy stares after them both and then warily shifts his attention to the Blood God, meeting eyes already watching him with curling lips.

"So."

"So *what*?" Tommy bites out with tension that itches and crawls beneath his skin.

"You saved Siren's life."

And-

Tommy can't stop the flinch, the way one foot draws instinctively back to put more space between them, bumping against the couch where the Vigilante grasps onto the fabric of his pants, curling weakly as his chest rises and falls with a groan of pain.

"Fuck off," he grits out. "That's none of your business."

"No, I think it's *very much* my business when the top Hero of this country decides to go back on his word and try to kill one of mine." The Blood God is still sitting down, boots planted firmly on the ground, but there's a creeping of fear and something ugly and wrathful all at once that makes Tommy's fingers curl tight against his palms, heart pounding loud in his ears. "Do you even know *why* yourself? Or have you been discarded and left behind, your loyalty paid with *nothing*."

"You know nothing," Tommy snarls, eyes bright with fury, "about *me* or *Dream*."

"Red Chaos, all alone and fumbling, nothing more than a *dog* without its *owner*." Red eyes, the colour of blood and violence. "What a *miserable* thing you've been reduced to."

And-

Tommy can only stand there, tasting his own blood as his teeth sinks down hard on the inside of his cheek, a warning to himself as he forces himself to turn his back to the Villain as the

power dampener burns against his skin, a wrap of iron that had stolen everything from him as Dream knelt to put it on him with leather gloves that offers no comfort as they brushes over his skin.

Shrinking, resizing and settling tight against his wrist with a dull purple glow that settles to leave something unremarkable.

Marred with scars that's messy, choppy and desperate where he'd tried to pry it off, knives and nails and teeth that tears into it in the desperation of the night as he trembles and shakes and folds on himself with everything he's lost with a hollow beating in his heart.

"You know *nothing*," he rasps, clinging to the words with everything he is.

Because Tommy swears himself to a boy with bright green eyes and a cocky kind of smile, his skin marred with violence under the excuse of punishment and corrections, a boy who dreams of more than the world will give him and who presses his forehead against his shoulder, confessions spilling horse and choked with Tommy's hand pressing against the brand on his neck.

"I didn't want to do it, I didn't want to do it- you have to believe me, Tommy, you have to, you have to-"

Desperate, breaking and fracturing, tripping over the words that falls from his lips in a rush.

"He was my friend- or I thought he was I don't- I can't- he left me, Tommy, he left me and now all I have is you-"

The world leaves them both a bit broken, a bit wrecked, bruised flesh and an understanding that things are unfair and cruel.

Dream puts his mind on the future, desperate to believe in something better, and Tommy puts his faith in Dream because Dream has already proven that there is something better in the world than what he'd known.

"Sap- 've to-" Chronos fingers pulls at the fabric of his pants, making him jerk, head swiveling to meet the flickering glow of the Vigilante's eyes as a hand presses weakly against the soft cushions to try and struggle up. "Wh'r-"

"You're okay," Tommy interrupts, skin prickling as he bent down to press a firm palm against a trembling shoulder, forcing him back and down as he pressed one knee down to avoid towering over him. "You're going to be fine, you're getting help, you're safe."

It's a mantra he's told to many during the years, sometimes a lie, sometimes more complicated.

"Re'?" Chronos blinks at him, confusion clear as more blood spills from his eyes and Tommy uses his sleeve to wipe some off it away to a fluttering of tired eyes, shadows dark beneath them. "Nee' to 'ell-" A cough, wet red and choking with a flaring of wide eyes and a

desperate spastic motion that Tommy stills with a hand grasping tight, carefully tipping him to the side, one ear on the sound of steps behind him-

"He's in a bad shape" the Blood God grunts as he knelt down before the Vigilante's face, a broad palm spanning across the pale face to study eyes that flickers and dulls, blood and saliva dripping from the corner of parted lips. "He must have had something really important to tell you to allow it to get this bad."

Tommy's chest twists, a dull beat of guilt that roots deep and dark in his chest.

"What's really going on here, Red Chaos?" He meets red eyes that pierces deep into his soul. "Whatever it is, it's bigger than you and Dream and I don't much like that."

"Yeah?" Tommy snorts tiredly. "What'cha gonna do about it?"

"Let me tell you a story." The Blood God's mouth is a sharp twist of tusks and teeth. "A story of a man called *Theseus*. His country, well, his city state technically, was in danger, and he set himself forward into enemy lines; he slayed the Minotaur and saved his city." There's a pause, a heavy weight in the air between them. "You know what they did to him?"

"*What?*" Tommy forces out.

"They exiled him." The Villain rises up, towering above him with a roll of heavy shoulders. "He died in disgrace, despised by his people. That's what happens to Heroes. The Greeks knew the score."

"And I'm what, supposed to be this Theseus guy?" Tommy levels the Villain with a glower.

"Take it as a warning." The Villain bares his teeth in a grin of too sharp teeth, a quiet kind of danger in the rippling of muscles as his arms folds across a broad chest. "Jester called three favours tonight. Do you know what they were for?"

Tommy's brow furrows before he reluctantly shakes his head.

"For you and Chronos to leave here alive." A head tilting, still looking down at him, easily a head taller where he stands. "For Siren to stay behind."

Tommy jerks, eyes momentarily flaring wide before he catches himself, focusing down on the Vigilante as he sinks into the depth of his hood with a twist of his mouth behind his mask.

"A waste of a good favour, if you ask me," the Blood God snorts, heavy and judging with the flaring of his nostrils. "He's a cautious guy, Jester, and too clever for his own good." A stretch of his lips. "You must have made an impression on him. He isn't in the habit of using up favours for small stuff."

"Yeah?" Tommy bites out.

"*Yeah,*" the Villain echoes. "And it makes me wonder *why* he was so keen on keeping Siren out of here and how it relates to *you*." A step towards him, arms unwiring and one hand coming down to grasp his shoulder as Tommy jerks back, teeth baring behind his mask as his

shoulders draws tight beneath the heat of the man's palm. "What's your deal?" A rumble, face craning close, eyes burning into his as the grasp tightens painfully. "I tire of you Heroes and your games. You're nothing more than government *dogs*, upholding a system of corruption--"

"*You don't think I know that!?*" The words explodes out of him with something savage and desperate, furious and tangled with something that breaks his voice as he shakes his head, chest heaving. "Dream- he fucking *knows*, we all do, but we're trying- we're trying to fix that! Don't you fucking--" He falters, humiliation burning hot under the gaze of the Villain who still holds him tight, eyes narrowed, something he doesn't understand in the hybrid's gaze. "It's a shit system," Tommy forces out. "And there's so much- so *fucking much* going on behind the scenes that are just- it's *ugly*."

"Yeah?" The Villain leans closer, breath warm against his face. "So tell me about it then, little Hero."

"Stop *fucking calling me that*-" Tommy snarls furiously. "Call me a mutt, a dog, a *bitch*, I don't give a fucking shit, people have called me far worse, but don't you fucking mock me for something I've bled and nearly died for." He squares his shoulders. "I chose to be a Hero, and you can think whatever the hell you want about that, but I *earned* that spot."

The Villain snorts, hand finally releasing him, and Tommy wastes no time jerking himself back with two stumbling steps before he halts, breathing out harshly.

"There are good things too," Tommy grits out as the Villain regards him. "It's fucking complicated."

"It always is," the Villain says with an undercurrent of something he doesn't understand, "until it *isn't*."

And-

Tommy bites down hard on his tongue because he knows better than to disagree, tired of looping arguments that amount to *nothing* because sometimes words mean shit and he *knows* that.

The Syndicate has been around for longer than he's been a Hero, rising with the Angel of Death, The Blood God following in his path and finally Siren, an anarchy group branded as Villains, the sum of gold on their heads high-enough to keep anyone living comfortable for several lifetimes over.

Last time Tommy had looked over his own wanted poster he'd been up there with them, something that filled him with a sense of dissonance where he'd sat on his couch in his apartment in just an old t-shirt and boxers.

The sound of a metal door dragging open makes them both turn to see the Angel stepping through it, talons delicately wrapped around the mouth of a glass beaker where something glitters strange inside of it, the liquid a swirling mix of blue and purple.

“Really?” the Blood God drawls, shifting his attention to his fellow Syndicate member. “Jester is gonna rip into you for that solution.”

“Eh, he’ll have to find a way to deal with it,” the Angel shrugs, blue eyes drifting to meet Tommy’s where he stands tense, knuckles pressing hard against the leather of his gloves. “Jester asked a favour of you, didn’t he?”

“Yeah,” Tommy forces out, swallowing the hostility that struggles to fill his chest. “To stay until he arrives.”

The Angel hums and Tommy thinks of the way the man had stepped into his apartment, bemusement and something like interest in the gaze that finds his as the Villain showed him how to cook rice, how to measure ingredients, a feather left with a package delivered during the night-

But that had been Tommy, not Red Chaos.

Their history is darker, grittier, filled with too much blood and violence to offer anything but a strained sort of allowance for the circumstances at hand.

Tommy knows that there’s no-one who holds tighter to favours than the Blood God and that, if anything, he knows he can trust even as all his instincts shouts against it, fingers slowly unfurling at his side as the Angel steps towards them.

“What is it?” he asks dubiously as he eyes the liquid.

“A potion of weakness,” the Angel answers and Tommy blinks, brow furrowing.

“I thought those were outlawe-“ He catches himself, flushing when he realized just who he was talking to and ducking his head as the Blood God rumbled out a laugh of amusement. “Shut up,” he mutters. “It was a valid observation.”

“Most potions have gone forgotten to history,” the Angel comments idly as he knelt down beside the Vigilante who is flushed and shivering. “We lack ingredients to make most of them but potion of weakness is a simple enough to make if you know how.”

Bad had said something along the same lines, Tommy remembers, shifting to peer closer as the Angel uncorked the beaker.

Most potions had contained something called *nether wart*, with very few exceptions, and there had been plenty of attempts to replicate potion of regeneration and healing without success. It was why those with healing powers were so desperately protected and valued, locked up where they could be kept *safe*. Or at least that was the excuse.

Tommy had met one of those healers only once, at Dream’s side as a man with red, black and yellow mask that covered everything but the brown of his eyes and skin, bent down to press his palm flat against Dream’s chest.

Ponk, that had been his name, if Tommy remembered right.

He'd been killed just weeks later, all that had been left behind an arm roughly torn off and left in a pool of blood in the Warden's path. It had been something of a pandemonium with repercussions that had hit hard and unfair.

"So it'll, what, forcefully shut his powers off?" Tommy asks, watching warily as the Angel looped one arm carefully around the back of the Vigilante whose head drops against his chest, cradled as the mouth of the beaker pressed against his lips, tipped slowly under the dull white glow of his gaze. "I didn't know it could be used that way."

Potions of weakness were largely considered useless, though some clung reverently to what remained of the past history of the world.

"It depends," the Angel answers as the arm around the Vigilante shifts to allow his hand to massage against Chronos' neck to help him swallow as the bottle slowly emptied. "Largely it's a matter of what kind of power it is and how it works." His gaze shifts, bright blue and with a dull glow in the dim basement as they meet his. "It wouldn't do much to impact a hybrid, they're naturally more resistant to potions of all kind, and most would at most experience dizziness, nausea and a wave of tiredness."

The Villain focuses back on the Vigilante, beaker empty and handed to the Blood God who flicks it into the air, catching it and then throwing it over on the opposite couch with a bounce.

"But Chronos' powers are hard wired into his brain, it's why the backlash is hitting him so hard, and the potion should, in theory, forcefully shut that part of him down."

Tommy stares at him.

"So it's *guesswork*?" he asks skeptically.

"An educated guess," the Angel clarifies and there's a whisper of humour in the undertone of his voice. "With how much he's strained his powers it's going to knock him out once they're shut off. For days easily, perhaps even weeks."

And-

The Vigilante's eyes flickers, slowly losing the white glow with a choked breath of panic, eyes widening and one hand darting up to curl helplessly into the black and green robes of the Villain holding him.

"No- " Chronos's gasps, struggling futilely in arms that keeps him steady even as he twists, gaze darting desperately. "No, no, no, no what did you *do*-"

"Saved your life," the Blood God says flatly from where he stands at the Angel's shoulder.

"*NO! No you don't understand-*" Chronos' tears himself out of the Angel's grip, scrambling with weak limbs after twisting, and Tommy darts forward to prevent him from tipping right over the armrest, getting an armful of Vigilante who claws into his hoodie, breath wheezing and stuttering against his neck as he braces his knees. "You don't get it! None of you do!"

“It’s okay,” Slimecicle pipes up and Tommy jerks, having completely forgotten about the small slime that had remained completely silent. “Jester will be here soon.”

“That’s not the *point*!” Chronos groans as Tommy shifts an arm around him and hoists him up more properly. “I need- I need- you can’t- I can’t get them again, I can’t, I can’t, I *can’t*!”

And-

There’s something hot spilling against his neck, a choked sob against the fabric of his hoodie as the Vigilante trembles and Tommy stills in place, a curl of something uncomfortable settling thick inside of him at the sheer, horrible *desperation* that’s naked and bare in the words.

“I’ll look into it,” Tommy hears himself saying, lowering his voice as the Vigilante clings tighter, energy dwindling with a clawing grip that falters, more of his weight settling on him as he gasps for breath. “You told me enough, I’ll- I’ll figure it out. I *promise*.”

Tommy doesn’t make promises easily.

He’s never been comfortable with the favour system, he’s a Hero, he isn’t supposed to be *repaid* for doing his fucking job. But in a world of Heroes and Villain, where gold and money mean little, favours, bartering and repaid debts are the currency at large.

He understands it but-

His loyalty to Dream is without conditions, unfaltering and steady, and then desperate as he fumbles without his mentor at his side.

He has his own way of doing things, not because he’s owed it, not because he owes someone, but because it’s the *right thing to do*.

He doesn’t know if Chronos hears him or not, the man limp against him as he carefully shifts him to lay him back down on the couch before straightening up, one hand disappearing into his hoodie to massage against his neck as he stares down at the Vigilante, mouth twisting.

“Look into *what*.” He jerks, stiffening as he snapped his head around to meet the Blood God’s burning gaze. “What did you just promise him?”

“None of your business,” Tommy snaps back, taking a wary step away from both him and the Angel, the shift of energy in the room making the hair on the back of his neck rise. “That’s between him and me.”

“Don’t be like that, mate.” The Angel tilts his head, predator and prey regarding each other, but only Tommy is aware of how hopelessly outmatched he is between the three of them. “It was important enough that he risked his own health for it which means it’s something big.”

“Big enough that Dream would discard his triumph card like yesterday’s trash,” the Blood God rumbles, taking a step towards him, Tommy matching him with one back. “Big enough that Schlatt would challenge Las Nevadas itself to get his hands on you when you finally

crawled out from the hole you'd been licking your wounds in." A grin, feral and knowing. "You're wrapped up in this, one way or the other."

"You are hopelessly out of allies," the Angel points out, wings flaring out with a ruffle of dark feathers which gleams in the dull light. "And you're being hunted by people on both sides."

"Yeah," Tommy musters up, tense and uneasy as he flicks his gaze towards Chronos and then back at the Angel of Death whose stands shorter than him and yet-

"You think you have what it takes to deal with this on your own?" the Angel's voice is a deceptively gentle thing and-

Sometimes Tommy forgets the danger of the people he's dealing with, a part of his mind still caught up with the stilling silence of his apartment with the Blood God eating ramen on his couch, caught up with the red jacket that wraps warm around him, collar high enough to allow him to burrow his nose into it with a hidden grin on cold days.

It's feathers, sharp and dangerous and torn out of his skin to leave spots of mottled scars, talons tearing deep over his chest, an axe that only narrowly avoid decapitating him-

It's his world that fractures and breaks as he presses his forehead down against the shoulder of a Villain and screams in the aftermath of betrayal, his, Dream's, he doesn't know, all he knows is that *everything is wrong and he doesn't know how to fix it*.

Run, something whispers in the back of his mind, instincts that has saved him on more than one occasion as he takes a hard step back. *Runrunrun-*

"I'm fine on my own," Tommy bites out, a tremble running through him, the bracelet on his wrist hot with the pounding of his panic that leaves him feeling cold, sweat dampening his back, fingers curling tight to hide the way they shake. "I'm- I don't need anyone other than Dream."

"Funny that." The Blood God's merciless gaze bores into his. "It doesn't seem like he needs you at all."

And-

Tommy sucks in a breath, a whistling through the voice changer in his mask, heart too fast inside his chest, something ringing inside his brain as he stares at the Villain who slowly tips his head to the side, looking almost bored if not for the gleam of his eyes.

"Or am I wrong?"

"Shut up," Tommy rasps out. "You know *nothing*."

"And you do?" the Blood God scoffs as he eased back. "You've got the whole world thirsting for your blood and nowhere to turn."

“What he means,” the Angel says with a flick of his wings, “is that this isn’t something you can deal with on your own.”

“And I’m meant to turn to you for help?” Tommy laughs, a wretched sound that bubbles up from deep in his chest. “Sure, let me just- ask the same people who’s nearly killed me on several occasions if they want to help me get back to the same person who nearly killed one of their own. Because that sounds like a *stellar* fucking plan.” His mouth twists jagged and sharp behind his mask. “I’m not an idiot, whatever investment you have in this is entirely personal and I don’t trust you anywhere near Dream.”

“That’s on you.” The crown on the Blood God’s head is a jagged thing of gold. “Jester’s favour is keeping you safe here tonight.” A considering look. “I’ll get my answers, one way or the other, *Theseus*.”

It’s a hollow sort of withering understanding that settles between them as Tommy averts his gaze with a clenching of his jaw.

He has no favours to call on from the Blood God.

The next time they see each other he’s the one being hunted.

-

Tommy places himself as far away from both Villains as he can, leaning back against the cold concrete wall behind him, arms folded tight against his chest to hide the way his fingers twitches in a rhythmic kind of motion against his chest.

1, 2, 3, 4, thumb, 1, 2, 3, 4, thumb-

It’s the only real distraction he allows himself, hood tugged low to hide the way he watches the Angel’s fingers dart over the screen of his phone where he sits at the feet of Chronos, the Blood God once again on the couch opposite him, back turned to him with a dismissive sort of unconcern.

As if Tommy offers him no danger.

The truth of it stings, it hurts, it gnaws, a helpless sort of horrible thing that wraps around his heart and lungs because he doesn’t stand a fucking chance as he is now and he *hates it*.

Hates what he’s been reduced to, alone without Dream at his side.

He draws a sharp breath, lets it out, fingers stilling as he caught the first sound of dress shoes clacking against the flooring and looks up just in time for the green metal door to be pushed open with flourish as Jester stepped through, Nemesis at his heels.

His yellow wings are ruffled, his gaze locking onto Chronos with a sharp narrowing of his one visible eye before his head turns to meet his.

“Red,” Jester greets curtly.

“Jester.” Tommy struggles against the strange sense of relief that the arrival of the owner of Las Nevadas brings with him. “You took your sweet time.”

“Was a bit busy cleaning up the mess you left me with,” Jester scoffs. “Fucking *Schlatt*.” He turns to the Angel of Death, visibly avoiding looking at the Blood God with a sharp jut of his chin. “How’s he doing?”

“I gave him a potion of weakness,” the Angel hums. “It cut his powers off but he’s going to be out of it for a while. He’s both dehydrated and malnourished and he needs an IV set sooner rather than later.”

Jester nods. “I’ll arrange it,” he says with a slow easing of his shoulders. “He’ll be fine then?”

“As far as I can tell,” the Angel agrees with a flicker of his gaze to Tommy and a tip of his head. “If he’d hesitated for even an hour longer to contact you he wouldn’t have been.”

“I guess I owe you that favour then.” Jester claps his hands together as he turns to him. “What do you say, Red? Got anything you want to cash it in for?”

“Take is as payment for dealing with Schlatt,” Tommy bites out as he pushes away from the wall. “Are we done here?”

Jester raises a brow at him. “You’re not serious, are you?”

“I already told you- you don’t owe me *shit*.” Something strange flickers in the Villain’s gaze, brow dipping. “Chronos needed my help, I’m a Hero, it’s what I fucking *do*.”

“You’re not really in a position to deny favours,” the Blood God grunts, arm on the back of the couch as he turns and tips his head to look at him. “It’s quite a big thing to have the owner of Las Nevadas owe you one.”

“Don’t you go buttering me up,” Jester snorts. “And you’re one to talk, you’re stubborn as hell when it comes to anyone owning you anything.”

“What can I say?” The Blood God shrugs. “I just make sure not to put myself in a position where I *need* to be owed. Comes with the territory.”

Jester makes a low skeptical noise, gaze studiously on Tommy who takes a step towards the door, intent on getting the hell out of there.

“Nemesis, can you do be a solid and make sure he gets out alright?” Jester requests suddenly. “And Slime-“

“I wanna stay here!” Slimecicle protests immediately from Tommy’s hoodie even as he reaches out to wrap his fingers around the slime and pull him out. “I’m having fun!” Brown eyes, a gooey dripping body of green that threatens to slip through his fingers before Tommy presses his palm beneath him.

“We can do some adventuring, just the two of us,” Nemesis offers in a soft voice as she holds out her palm and Tommy tips the slime into it.

Slimecicle wastes no time wrapping his arms tight around her thumb as she draws him towards her chest in a gentle cradle.

“You promise?” Slimecicle perks up. “I like adventuring. The forest was pretty and the car was warm.”

“I promise,” Nemesis assures him as she steps towards the door.

Tommy throws one last look at the Villains inside the room, at the Blood God, at the Angel of Death, and finally Jester who tips his head with a complicated furrow of his brow before the door closed shut behind him.

-

“I wanted to say thank you,” Nemesis says when Tommy drags the door of the stolen car open and drops roughly into the seat. “For saving Siren’s life.”

Tommy grasps for the seatbelt and yanks it over his chest to shove it in place with a *click*.

“I know it cost you a lot.” There’s something complicated in the dip of her mouth when he finally looks up at her, at brown eyes, just a shade different from Wilbur’s. “So I’m grateful.”

“You’re one of the few then,” Tommy bites out, more harshly than he means, hand wrapping tight around the wheel to hide the tremble of his fingers. “They sure as hell didn’t seem very grateful.”

“It’s more complicated than that and you know it.” Her head tilts. “You’re not a fool, Red Chaos. But you’re stubborn and you’re loyal and that makes you dangerous.” Her hand closes around the top of the door, halting him from pulling it shut, and he shoots her wary glower. “I owe you one, whether you accept it or not. That’s my call to make.”

And-

Tommy really can’t fucking deal with this right now. His nerves are frayed, he inches away from a breakdown, and he wants nothing more than to get home, to call Wilbur, to have his friend wrap his arms around him and hold him tight-

“Fine,” he bites out. “*Just-* I don’t care, do whatever, I- I’m-“ His voice breaks and his fingers curls tighter around the wheel, knuckles white and pressing hard against the leather of his gloves as he averts his gaze away from her. “*Just-* let me go,” he forces out.

“You’re a good Hero,” Nemesis tells him softly. “For what it’s worth, I’ve always liked that about you.”

She releases the door and he drags it shut, cutting off the slime who instead waves from Nemesis palm as he blindly hooks the cords together beneath the dashboard with a rough

twist, letting the car rumble to life as he sucks in a desperate breath and lets it out, shaking as he twists the wheel and floors the gas the moment the garage door reaches the top.

-

Tommy stumbles into his apartment, tearing off his goggles and mask, letting it fall where he drops them as he wrestles off his blood-stained hoodie, breathing harsh as he makes for his bedroom and pushes the door open, kicking it shut roughly behind him.

He steps back, sliding down against the door, fingers digging into his hair as he burrows into his knees.

Around him the animals Wilbur had painted are the only ones to see him struggle desperate for breath, choking, his skin clammy with sweat as he sinks his fingers into his hair to tug harshly at his blond curls, a low whine bubbling up before he forcefully cuts it off, teeth sinking hard into the inside of his cheek.

“There’s something else-“ Wilbur’s voice ghosts as a reminder in the back of his mind. *“But you’re not allowed to listen to it until I’ve left.”*

Tommy can’t call Wilbur like this, he can’t, but-

He pushes up, stumbling blindly for the old record player his friend had left him and sinking down on his knees in front of it, palm slamming against the play button as he heaves for one breath after the other, eyes on the small needle that shifts to settle against it.

A clearing of a throat, Tommy’s breath catching in his chest, and then-

“Chapter 1: Lucy looks into a wardrobe.” Tommy’s eyes falls close and he drops forehead drops down against the record player, clinging desperately to the sound as he curls around it. *“Once there were four children whose names were Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy. This story is about something that happened to them when they were sent away from London during the war because of the air-raids-“*

It’s a bedtime story.

Wilbur- he’s reading him a *fucking bedtime story*.

There’s disbelief, something else, Wilbur’s voice steady and sure as the words falls from his lips, working down it until there’s a shift and a page flip.

Distantly Tommy can hear the stroke of a brush behind the words as he squeezes his eyes tightly shut and-

“- then she saw that there was light ahead of her; not a few inches away where the back of the wardrobe ought to have be, but a long way off. Something cold and soft was falling on her. A moment later she found that she was standing in the middle of a wood at night-time with snow under her feet and snowflakes falling through the air-“

Tommy is too old for bedtime stories. Too old for any kind of story. It has been *years* since he read anything for the sake of falling into the imagination of another world entirely where make-believe offered any kind of comfort.

He'd left all of that behind as he fell deeper and deeper into the world of Heroes, the training grueling, research taking up hours of his time and leaving him to flop down on Dream's bed with a groan of exhaustion.

And yet-

And *yet* there's comfort in the sound, in Wilbur's warm voice, in hearing the way he moves as he reads, interrupting himself with a hum or a click of his tongue, never for long, soon starting up again, inviting him deeper into the world where a magic wardrobe in an old house offers adventure for four children and further away from the tumbling chaos of his own mind.

Chapter End Notes

Well. That's something all right.

Ayo, hello and welcome back to another chapter of Hush Now :) where things are messy and our boi is coping. Kinda.

It's, uh, complicated.

I'm very delighted you're all enjoying Hush Now :) hope you're all having a good day/night!

-

In honour of hitting 8k kudos I've started up a discord server for Hush Now so- if you guys are interested in that, here's a link [Hush Now Discord](#)

There's a discussion channel for Hush in general, and one for the newest chapter, so keep an eye on that if you want to avoid spoilers and be mindful of each other, alright? And if there's any issue don't be afraid to reach out - my mods and I are still working out the kinks of it to make sure it's all good vibes.

If you don't wanna hang out on discord you can also find me on tumblr [corpse-art](#) so feel free to swing by there :) I usually let people know around an hour in advance before a new chapter gets dropped if you're interested in that kind of thing.

-

DUDES. We have a ton of Hush Now art and I'm just shfk pls. Its amazing. You're alla amazing. Go and give them some love<3

[A Game of Cards by_ghostiereanimated](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[Coffee Shop by_kathyrealmstales](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[Jester of Las Nevadas by_stillamisfit](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[Stray Cats by_kathyrealmstales](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[The hero business sure isn't pretty by_mothercoyote](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[FANART MASTERPOST](#)

Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

There's a sense of lingering dissonance when Tommy pries his eyes open in the morning, his mouth dry and body stiff and half-slumped against the record player.

He feels like shit as he slowly pushes himself off it, allowing himself to just flop down on his back, staring blankly up at the ceiling as he scrubbed one hand over his eyes, grimacing as he paused to pry crust away from the corners.

"I promise."

Fuck, Tommy thinks, but it feels strangely hollow and echoing inside him, as if he can't grab for the proper emotions, out of his reach to leave something thick and syrupy instead, pulling at his eyelids and curling around his bones with a physical ache.

He grimaces and rolls over to his stomach, pushing up with a sluggish kind of feeling and using his bed to half-crawl over to his dresser and plop down with a whoosh of a breath as he tipped forward to press his forehead against the wood.

Tommy is used to feeling out of his depth- it comes with the fucking territory of being a Hero. Situations were rarely predictable, forcing him to think on his feet and make split-moment decisions that sometimes worked, sometimes *really* fucking didn't. Any kind of planning tended go out the window in one way or the other because people were rarely rational, especially when pushed into a corner.

And *yet*-

Perhaps it's the absence of Dream, perhaps it's because he doesn't have his powers, but the fear that had pounded through him in the meeting with the two Syndicate leaders *chafes*, and no matter how he loops it, nitpicks at himself, looking for things he could have done differently, things he could have worded better-

It had left him feeling small, foolish, in some ways, with the echoing words of *little Hero* clinging thick and oozing to his skin.

It's nothing but mockery.

Tommy had crossed paths the Blood God enough times to know that the Villain enjoyed pushing buttons, to pick and prod until he had an understanding of his opponent, and he wonders how much he'd given away with words that spills hot and livid as he'd bristled defensively.

He drags a palm over his face, blowing out a harsh noise through his nose, and yanks the lowest drawer out.

The top hoodie is a lilac one with a blue sheep in shades on it, the text bold with *BAAAD to the bone* spelled out, and his fingers presses gently against the deceptively soft fabric, tracing over it.

It's one of his more recent ones, at least two sizes too big for him to *grow into* which was shit, Tommy is sixteen, almost seventeen, and he's been six foot three for-fucking-ever.

His shit posture tended to shave several inches off it and he'd gotten into the habit of allowing it in his civilian persona. Anything that separated him from Red Chaos in the few interactions he had outside the tower had been a win.

Dream had crammed the hoodie roughly over his head when he'd been hunched over a report, room dark with only the glow of the laptop, George half-asleep on the other end of the couch, half-curved around a pillow.

He'd lifted his index finger to his lips, green eyes glittering in the white light as Tommy's head popped through it, indignant with a curse already on parting lips. "*Don't wake him up. Look how cute he looks.*"

Tommy did, in fact, *not* find Gogy cute but he knew how many hours the older man had been pouring into work and had let his mouth click shut with a glower that only made his mentor grin, a hand reaching out to offer him a quick tousling of his hair.

Dream had plopped down at the foot of the couch, dragging a small plastic bag towards him and carefully picking out a small square box which he'd passed back to Tommy before grabbing one for himself.

August fifteenth. Two days after Dream's birthday. His mentor had been away for a long-meeting with people in charge of the Hero commission and it had gone over time, shaking his head when Tommy had raised an eyebrow in silent question at the deep bags beneath his eyes and the frazzled strands of his dark blond hair where fingers had tugged and ran roughly through it.

They had each eaten a piece of apple pie in the silence of the room as Tommy silently shared what information they'd been able to gather on a strange case where people had turned up in odd locations, disorganized and with no memory since they'd first been reported missing.

When Dream had leant his head back against his knee Tommy had said nothing, merely shifting his laptop to carefully reach out and smooth down some of the strands, halting when Dream stilled. But when his mentor had made no protest he'd continued, letting his words trail into small talk about this and that to drown out the silence.

It hasn't even been five months since then but it still feels like a lifetime ago and his fingers curl into the fabric, gently pulling it into his lap.

"Aww, a sheep! That's cute!"

Tommy jerks, hand slapping over his face as the other wrapped around something gooey with a *squelch* as his fingers closed shut hard, pulling the green slime from his neck with a

clawing scoop against his skin and slowly bringing it down to stare at it, heart pounding.

How much-

How fucking much-?

He pushes up to his feet, stumbling his way to the living room, eyes darting desperately until he zeroes on his mask and scoops it up, pressing it against his mouth with a *hiss* as it sealed in place.

Tommy smears the goo over the table surface with a grimace before diving for his hoodie, pulling it roughly on and yanking the hood up.

“What the fuck are you doing here?” Tommy snarls, metallic and echoing in his mask as he twists around. “How much did you *see*-?”

“I didn’t mean to,” Slimecicle whines as his head slowly forms in the pile of slime, visibly pouting at him as an arm and then another slowly followed after, pushing down to press up as his chest slowly formed. “I won’t tell anyone what you look like, I promise! And I’m really bad at drawing.” He nods to himself, arms crossing, still lacking his legs as Tommy stared at him, shell-shocked. “It’s like a secret!” His eyes slowly widens, bright and glittering as his hands presses over his mouth. “Because I’m on a secret *mission*,” the slime breathes, “for an *adventure*.”

“*What?*” Tommy squeezes out with a rasp. “You’re *here* because-“

“Adventure!” Slimecicle agrees happily, eyes brown and glittering as he perked up. “I forgot I left some slime on you. I’m sorry. Jester hates when I do that.” He wilts. “And Nemesis promised to take me on an adventure and all as well but I- I wanted to go on an adventure with *you*. So when I realized I left some slime on you *well*,” Slimecicle pokes the tips of his tiny fingers together.

And Tommy-

Tommy really isn’t in the right state of mind to handle this.

“I really won’t tell,” Slimecicle says earnestly, small head tilting, only a third of the size he’d been, at most the length of his index finger. “I turned off the story thing when you fell asleep and I saw. I’m sorry.”

Tommy slowly sinks down, clawing his mask off and dropping it to the floor as he stares helplessly at the slime.

“Jester-“

“Won’t even know I’m gone!” Slimecicle assures him, perking up, head bobbing happily. “I am in many places, all the time, for I am but a small part of the big me who is in Las Nevadas.”

“Right,” Tommy manages, not sure what to feel, one hand scrubbing against his neck. “So-you, what, just want to *hang* with me?”

“*Adventure*,” Slimecicle repeats with emphasis.

Tommy snorts despite himself, exhaustion dragging him back under as the adrenaline high ran its course through his system. “Sure, that.” He scratches a hand against his neck, the other fishing for his phone to squint down at the time.

2 am.

He had almost twelve hours until he was meant to be seeing Sapnap in that alleyway, if Chronos was to be trusted, and Tommy doesn’t even know where he stands with the man anymore. It feels like things are crumbling left and right around him and a part of him is afraid of reaching out, of discover how much of what they’d been had been a lie.

Sapnap had been the closest to his age and in some ways Tommy had felt close to him because of that, had enjoyed the banter, even when it made him indignant, protesting loudly when Sapnap had pulled him into the rare headlock to roughly scrub his knuckles down against his scalp.

But it wasn’t his company Sapnap sought out in the tower, teasing George and Dream both, getting into fights with them, frustrated and complaining to Tommy after several such occasions when he’d found Sapnap furiously working on something in the garage.

It had rarely lasted long, the three of them had a way of drifting back together, arguments sometimes solved with silence lapsing into a snort, a laugh, more following, tension draining out of the air as Tommy drew silently back into his or Dream’s room before someone could catch sight of him.

In some ways he’d envied it, but more than that he’d come to be relived that Dream had someone else to turn to when he couldn’t, or didn’t know how to fix it.

There had been a silent understanding between them, in the way Sapnap cooked more when Dream was overworking himself, appearing in the apartment to loudly interrupt his work and force him to sit down and eat, in George’s breath glittering with sleep as he blew a breath, cutting Dream off mid-word when he’d been into a four-day disaster without sleep to a heavy blink and stumbling steps to let him collapse back on the couch with a groan of protest.

Movie night, Dream slowly relaxing, finally falling asleep as Tommy stole away the reports he’d been working on to look and sort through.

Things had gotten bad during the last year, Tommy knows that, even if he doesn’t understand why. Sapnap’s frustration thick and so close to the surface that the wrong thing would set him off, the heat of his powers spilling out into the rooms, wrapping around them in quiet warning that he hardly seemed to be aware of.

George had gone the opposite route, sleeping more and more, unconcerned and concerned, his expression hard to judge when he’d dropped down on the couch beside Tommy, curling

bare feet up and wrapping his arms around his knees as he stared at whatever show Dream had put on for background noise with drooping eyes until he finally nodded off.

Tommy hadn't thought *too* much about it but now he wishes he had. He'd been far too wrapped up with Dream's longer and longer disappearances, exhaustion clear and mouth drawn thin when his mentor would flop down on the bed and pull the covers into an awkward hold beneath him, forehead burrowed down, shoulders and spine drawn stiff.

Moodiness in the Hero business wasn't exactly a strange thing. There had been more and more weight put on Heroes, missions running them hard, expectations high and any fault and mistake torn apart in the media, their actions scrutinized and judged.

Moods got tense, ramping up into a shitshow in the tower where Heroes gathered together, and Dream could only be torn apart over his *no killing* rule in so many different ways before Tommy could play fucking bingo with it.

Death, tragedy, *grief*.

Parents, family and friends who appeared on television with red eyes and demand for justice after Dream had taken in another Villain alive, a hand pressed against his midriff with a forgotten grimace as he stared intently at the television screen.

"How do you defend saving a Villain?"

"How can you allow them to live when [redacted] is dead?"

"How can you call yourself a Hero?"

Life is ugly.

More people die to starvation and sickness in a system that fails them over and over again than to Villain attacks, Tommy knows the statistics, silent beside his mentor, hearing the way the man's breath rasps from bruised and broken ribs as the interview progresses.

"We can't save them all," Dream says quietly that night when Tommy is half-asleep, one hand stretched out to brush fingertips against his mentor's arm. *"I understand why they're angry but killing them would have meant nothing but more tragedy. More bloodshed."* A pause. A breath. *"We already have enough of that going around."*

More than human.

Less than human.

Entertainment and soldiers.

Loved, envied and hated all at the same time.

"I am Charlie from Las Nevadas!" The slime offers as he slides down from the table, somehow succeeding in only turning half of his legs into slime with a noise that pulls Tommy's mouth into a grimace, quickly reshaping as he stepped forward, green goop

forming into a copy of Jester's outfit only with a dark green bow with little stars rather than the tie. "And you're Red Chaos from... from..." He halts, rocking back on black dress shoes where a slip of slime is trailing down like a weeping sock. "I don't know where you're from."

Tommy gives him a long look. "Do all Villains tell you where they're from?"

Charlie shakes his head, goopy strands of newly amassed brown hair moving with the motion. "I just *know*." The slime informs him, trotting closer to peer curiously up at him. "I know *everyone* but I don't know *you*, Red Chaos from Nowhere."

"Is that your power?" Tommy asks dubiously.

"My very human power," Charlie agrees easily and Tommy calls *bullshit*.

There's some *off* about Slimecicle in the same way Bad doesn't quite fit into the world around him with a tired look that dims the glow of his white eyes, or like the Golden Man of Las Nevadas that bleeds into life with a shimmering stretch of sinew muscles and bright neon green eyes.

The small slime blinks curiously up at him and all Tommy can think is *not human*.

"I don't know where I'm from either," Tommy huffs finally. "So you're not *wrong*." He drags fingers through his hair, grimacing. "How do I know you won't be reporting my every move to Jester?" he demands tiredly, fixing the slime with a dull look. "You work for him, right?"

Charlie brightens. "We can pinky promise!"

"*Pinky promise?*" Tommy echoes, lost, brow furrowing as the small slime stretched out his hand towards him, all fingers but his pinky curled back. "What's that?" he asks unsurely.

"It's a promise you can't break," Slimecicle informs him solemnly. "We hook our pinkies together, and then we swear, and it's an unbreakable bond!"

Tommy blinks at him, hesitating before slowly lifting his hand, curling four fingers against the palm of his hand as he lowered it down to the small being on the floor who stretches up on his toes, pressing his small pinkie against the side of his finger.

"I, Charlie Slimecicle of Las Nevadas, solemnly swear to never reveal the identity or face of Red Chaos from Nowhere unless given permission." Tommy studies the small slime who closes his eyes before he nods firmly and gently detaches his finger from him. "There! Now we're sworn."

"Just like that?" Tommy asks dubiously, twisting his hand to study his finger, seeing and feeling nothing remarkable.

Charlie offers him a bright smile and Tommy decides that it will have to do.

It's not like he can throw him out the fucking window, the fucker just keeps coming back.

-

Clothes in the washer Tommy stares tiredly down at the rice cooking in the skillet, nose wrinkling and stomach turning at the scent of food but knowing he needed to get something into himself.

“What’s this-?” There’s a crash and Tommy twists around, lips parting as he stares at the remains of his radio shattered on the floor. “Oh. It didn’t bounce.” Charlie peers curiously over the table edge as something exasperated wires through Tommy.

“There’s nothing on that table that is going to *bounce*,” Tommy informs him flatly.

“I’m hungry,” Charlie grins he shifts to dangle his feet. “I want pancakes.”

“I’m not making you pancakes.”

“But-“

“It’s rice or fucking *nothing*, alright?” Tommy snaps with a flare of irritation and the slime’s mouth snaps shut, drawing back, small arms wrapping around his chest as he turned away with a pout. “I’ll-“ Tommy breathes out. “Look- I’ll find something fun later but I just need-“ He drags a palm over his face. “I need to *think*,” he admits with a twist of his mouth. “So- just sit there and be quiet for a minute, alright?”

Charlie tilts his head, regarding him, and then raises his hand to mime zipping his mouth shut.

Tommy breaths out a sigh of relief as he turns back to his food.

-

“What about syrup?”

“For *fuck’s sa*-“

“You said one minute!”

-

Slimecicle happily eats the small serving of fried rice drenched in syrup beside him, served in a bottle cap because Tommy couldn’t find anything else small enough for the slime to hold.

He has no idea where it’d come from but he’s not about to tell the slime that.

On the television there’s a documentary about *sponges* of all things, colourful things in the depth of the ocean.

“*They consist of jelly-like mesophyll sandwiched between two thin layers of cells-*“

“Do you think they’re related to slime?” Charlie asks curiously, impossibly small on the pillow Tommy had dropped him on, refusing to get slime all over his poor couch. “They look like they could be related to slime.”

“Maybe,” Tommy grunts noncommittally, shoving a spoonful of rice into his own mouth, swallowing most of it without chewing with an uncomfortable grimace as he leant forward to grab blindly for the tall glass of water and chug half of it down.

-

Tommy has never owned a cat but he thinks that Slimecicle, if anything, would best be described as a cat in the shape of a small green humanoid.

“And then-“ The slime gestures eagerly, hands shadows behind the curtain Tommy had dragged between them as the cold water fell on his face as he stared blankly into the mouth of the showerhead. “I counted all his mouth bones and he had *so many* and they were all sharp! Like a shark!”

A very *talkative* cat.

The fucker had knocked on the door to the bathroom until Tommy, feeling like his brain was trying to leak out of his ear from the consistent pounding, had finally let him inside and dumped him on the faucet sink.

“It’s teeth,” Tommy hears himself saying, quiet and drowned away in the water. “*Teeth*. Not mouth bones.”

“- Foolish can even make them again! Like he just-“ Slimecicle snaps his teeth, the sound wet and squelching, and Tommy cringes. “And it just replaces them! Like that! Isn’t that just the *coolest*?”

So far Tommy has learned two things-

Apparently the Golden Man of Las Nevadas is named *Foolish*.

And he has *so many teeth*.

-

“You’re going to have to be quiet,” Tommy tells the slime half-draped over his shoulder, fixated on the way the needles work the roll of white yarn into small tight knots that slowly takes its shape. “I can’t have you just popping up at work, alright?”

“I’ll be in mission mode,” Slimecicle promises sleepily with a yawn that bubbles and pops in his mouth. “Can we add a heart to it?”

Tommy pauses. “I might have some red yarn left,” he admits, lifting the half-made tiny hoodie up to study it critically. “Back or front?”

“Front.” Slimecicle rubs the back of his hand over his eyes. “No ones ever made me clothes before,” the slime tells him, eyes drooping before being forcefully opened wide.

“You mean to tell me Jester isn’t the one who dressed you like a mini-him?” Tommy huffs.

“I make them,” Slimecicle tells him almost shyly. “Jester is kind. I like him. So I made clothes like him. The big me wears a t-shirt with three hearts.”

“So you’re like him but also *not* like him?” Tommy wonders with a furrow of his brow. “How does that even *work*?”

“I don’t know. I just am.” Slimecicle stretches out, wrapping his arms around the string of Tommy’s hoodie and pulling it close to drop his head down on it like a small pillow. “When I go back to the big me I will become him again.”

Tommy pauses.

“Oh,” he says, not sure what to feel as he finishes another row.

“That’s why I want an adventure,” the slime admits, smile tugging soft at the corners of his mouth. “I want to see the *world*.”

Tommy stares down at the white yarn, something curling heavy around his heart.

“I see,” he says as he starts up on the next row.

-

Tommy spends the last hour before work drying his hoodie with a hairdryer while scrolling through his phone, looking through the news as Slimecicle snored inside the fabric of his hood.

There’s not much more on the Las Nevadas fiasco. It wasn’t like Jester was about to make a public appearance for an interview, he was still a Villain, and Schlatt had his PR people tidying up the whole thing under the guise of *being worried about the potential threat of a dangerous Villain*.

“Red Chaos knows that he only needs to give himself up so we can sort out this entire situation. That’s what a true Hero would do.” The pause had been deliberate, lingering as Schlatt gazed out over the flashing lights of the hungry crowd. ***“His return after two months was with the meeting of a known Villain. Red Chaos has made his choice and it’s my duty to put a stop to him. To do what Dream could not and bring him to justice.”***

It’s the first time he’s been branded as something other than a Hero and the picture of him with Chronos hoisted over his shoulder had been circulated through every damn news source available.

A few had focused on the smile he’d painted on his back, putting the pictures side-by-side, raising questions that were drowned out in the path of Schlatt’s declaration.

Villain.

It feels like a mockery and it makes something ugly and vicious sink its claws into his heart where he sits on his bathroom floor, legs stretched out and hoodie slowly drying under the hot air.

He bites down on the inside of his cheek, kills the power and forces himself to his feet, straightening out to his full height before he looks into the mirror.

A familiar face greets him, his hair a mess of curls sticking out from being left to dry after a rough towel scrub, in desperate need of a trim, but he can't get himself to reach for the scissors that he know are tucked into the first-aid kit beneath the counter.

He stares at the odd scar on his ear where Jester had torn it open with a fucking *casino coin* of all things, and he brushes his fingers carefully over the thin white line before he reaches to open the mirror, grasping for the razor kit and carefully pulling it out to put it down on the small counter space.

Tommy grabs the shaving foam and squeezes a generous dollop into his palm.

It's a familiar thing, lathering up his cheeks and jaw, making sure to get his upper lip and the odd curls that grew sparse and stubborn beneath his chin if he allowed them to.

He washes his hands, drying them carefully before he opens the small case, revealing the razor that he carefully folds out from its wooden handle, sharp and gleaming, his thumb running carefully over the side of it.

"You shave with the grain," Dream informs him as his hand gently guides the blade against the line of his jaw. *"Don't press too hard, you don't have too, the blade is sharp enough that it'll do most of the work for you. All you need to do is guide its path. And then, when you're done, and if there's any place that still feels rough, you switch and go against the grain if you want a clean shaven look."*

Neither of them had made any mention of the fact that Tommy didn't grow hardly enough to get much more than odd strands here and there, most of it in odd patches.

He places the edge of the blade against his throat, swallowing, adam's apple bobbing against it before he carefully angles it up, dragging it up through the foam in a single well-practiced motion, wiping it off on the hand towel before repeating it, scraping it gently over the tip of his upper lip to make sure he got every last strand.

He scrubs the towel roughly over his face once done and then washes off the feel of the shaving foam with water and some soap.

He wonders, a bit absently, if Wilbur was the kind to use a bladed razor or if he was a disposable razors kind of man.

-

Hero gear shoved into his backpack along with Charlie, who had put a finger to his lips, promising his silence before Tommy zipped him up.

He just has to get to work, duck out early and then head into the city to meet up with Sappnap.

The knowledge fills him with both trepidation and something like ill-ease mixed with nausea as he breathes in and then out, staring down at Clementine in her small pot, placed on the windowsill in his kitchen to enjoy the morning light.

He brushes a finger gently up the fine delicate black barbs of the vane of the feather in her pot and-

He thinks about the picture the Angel of Death had made in his kitchen, careful and guiding, methodical as he worked Tommy through the steps, patient with a glittering amusement in the blue of his eyes.

It wars with the way the Villain had stared at him from across the room, dark wings like an omen of death behind him, talons curling black and dangerous, a warning of violence from their shared history with the tilt of his head.

Tommy.

Red Chaos.

Two very different receptions.

He snatches it up impulsively and makes his way to the living room, crouching down to reach the low shelf beneath the table, grabbing for the small sewing kit there and shrugging off his backpack beside him as he settled back against the couch and opened it up.

A small needle, black thread, yarn tied at the end of it-

He pokes it through the hollow shaft of the calamus and pulls the thread through it, the yarn struggling before sliding through alongside it, the same bright red as the small heart he'd made on Slimecicle's hoodie.

He measures it out around his neck before biting the end off with a snap of his teeth, tying it around his neck and tucking it down beneath his hoodie, flattening his palm over it with a breath that expands his lungs and ribs before he lets it out with a rush.

It's warm against his skin, brushing soft.

So different from the cold metallic feathers he'd yanked out of his skin.

A reminder, he tells himself as he closes his eyes and allows himself to just *breathe*.

-

"We save lives because they all mean something," Dream's voice is a resolute thing that rings out over the crowd, silencing them. *"You don't have to agree with me, or even understand*

where I'm coming from, but- as a Hero it's my duty to protect all life, not discriminate or judge."

Tommy tips his head, studying his mentor where he stands, chest rising and falling beneath the lime green of his hoodie, the smiling mask slowly turning over the crowd.

"That means that I'll protect Heroes, I'll protect Vigilantes, you citizens, and I'll do my damn best to protect Villains as well. That is my promise to you. To myself." The tension slowly drains out of his shoulder. *"I'm not here to play judge, jury and executioner. We Heroes aren't perfect, far from it, and the decision of who lives and who dies shouldn't lie in our hands."*

Pride. Warm, glowing, and sure.

-

Siren wraps a clumsy arm around his neck, dragging him down blindly to muffle the sound of his scream against the press of leather, his fingers clenching tight, clawing down on the Villain's arms as the chest beneath him heaves up and down.

"Shut up-" A tense desperate breath against his ear. *"He'll find us, Red- shit you need to calm down-"*

The arm draws him closer, not quite an embrace, too hard and forceful as a sweaty and dirt-stained palm pressed beneath his mouth to fold over his bare face.

"Bite me if you have to." Siren presses his forehead down against the top of Tommy's head as his breath stutters and chokes, tears spilling from wide open eyes. *"It's okay, it's okay, it's okay- I'm sorry, shit man, I'm so fucking sorry-"*

-

Siren hadn't looked that night, Tommy remembers that, his knees on either side of Siren's hips, staring blankly down at the Villain as everything crashed down upon him with a desperate clawing at his mask as he found himself unable to fucking *breathe*.

He doesn't know what to feel about it.

"Favour repaid and all that."

He clenches his teeth, yanking just a bit too hard on the cup of newly made coffee, hissing as it spilled over the edge and over his fingers which he jerks back with a curse.

He stares down at his fingers, bright red from the heat, teeth digging into the inside of his cheek-

"Tommy? Hey-" A hand gently circles his wrist to a twitch, his eyes meeting gold in a sclera of black as he was tugged from the coffee machine and into the back of the small kitchen, his chest rising and falling with something frail and thin inside of him as Sam turned on the water. "Lukewarm water, not cold will help with that. Keep it under and I'll be right back once I've dealt with the costumer."

Tommy hunches his shoulders, scowling down at the water, barely feeling it, the annoyance slowly bleeding out of him as he forced himself to focus on the sound of the water hitting the metal.

Sam's kitchen is half the size of the front of the café with a large walk-in freezer and boxy metallic fridge. There's other contraptions, to keep sheets of sugary things warm, or to cool them down quick, and one where Sam placed the occasional cakes that got custom ordered from him with a small card on the side.

The walls are painted a warm lemon yellow with a matching lemon tree framed in the midst of it, just over the counter where Sam did most of his baking and prep-work.

There's spots of flour from Sam's morning baking, a tray of what Tommy now knows to be peanut butter dog treats in the shape of bones, ready to bake and then be poured into the jar Sam kept beneath the counter to slip Fran a treat at the end of the day.

The click-clack of claws against the wooden flooring makes him glance down as Fran slunk into the room, her broad and heavy body brushing against his thigh before she settled down with a heavy thump of her tail beating once, twice, a low whine with the fold of her ears.

"I'm okay," Tommy forces out as his good hand drifts down to stroke over her head. "Just a small burn."

I'll miss you, he thinks, swallowing against something thick in his throat as he sinks to his knees, looping his arms around her neck and pulling her close, pain forgotten as her wet nose brushes over his ear before she turned her head to tuck it close against him, tail beating harder against the floor.

"Good girl," he whispers into her ear with an angling of his face. "You're the best girl, no other dog measures up to you."

Fran pants, nosing curiously at his neck as he reluctantly draws back, recognizing the returning steps of Sam, the pause of them in the door opening.

"Is everything okay, Tommy?" Sam asks hesitantly, his voice a gentle thing as he crouches down, one hand stroking gently over Fran's head as she angled towards him. "You've been out of it all morning."

"I'm-" The automatic response dies on his lips and-

He looks at Sam who had given him work, a place to return to outside the bare walls of his apartment, who'd fed him odd cookies and baked treats and made him a Christmas dinner with a thermos filled with hot chocolate before shoving his beanie over Tommy's head with a crinkling of the corner of his eyes.

At Sam who is patient and kind, who doesn't care if he's abrasive and rough to the costumers, who patiently doesn't push or prods but instead just lets him be *Tommy* with all his jagged pieces on full display in his small café.

“Tommy?” Sam is staring at him with a furrow of his brow, spots of green over his face, golden eyes meeting his. “You-“

“I need to go,” Tommy says abruptly as he stands up, feeling strangely shaky as he swallows. “I think- I think I’m coming down with a cold or something.”

The urge to flee is nearly overwhelming, choking thick in his throat as he steps past Sam and Fran, bending down only to snatch up his backpack and throw it over his shoulder from behind the counter-

“Tommy.” Sam’s voice halts him in his path, hand clenching white-knuckled around the strap of his backpack.

The café is empty, dim with odd mismatched furniture that somehow works, an invitation to sink down and just enjoy a cup of coffee around one of the low tables.

“You’ll always have a place here,” Sam tells him, softer but somehow more damning as Tommy’s shoulders draw tight. “No matter what.”

“You can’t promise that,” Tommy forces out. “*No one can.*”

“I’m not just anyone.” Sam is standing behind the counter, in the same place he’d been when Tommy first dared to make his way into the café, that familiar black apron dusted with flour where hands had wiped absently down the sides of them. “You’ll always have a place here,” he repeats, as if it means something, as if he has any understanding of who he’s talking to.

And he’s *wrong* because Tommy doesn’t belong here, doesn’t have a place here, in this world of civilians.

"I quit," he chokes out.

He closes the door shut behind him without another word and the last thing he hears the sound of the bell above it before the cold winter air wraps around him.

Chapter End Notes

Ah.

So, uh, *that* happened huh. I mean, you guys have been wanting to see Sam again-

It's mega late for me so I'm gonna shamelessly dip and get some sleep but :)

Thank you to each and everyone of you, I'm so very happy to have you all along for the Hush Now train<3

-

In honour of hitting 8k kudos (and we're somehow at 9k now??) I've started up a discord server for Hush Now so- if you guys are interested in that, here's a link [Hush Now Discord](#)

There's a discussion channel for Hush in general, and one for the newest chapter, so keep an eye on that if you want to avoid spoilers and be mindful of each other, alright? And if there's any issue don't be afraid to reach out - my mods and I are still working out the kinks of it to make sure it's all good vibes.

We also do event chats for MCC and that kind of stuff and movie nights now, apparently. So there's a bit of everything happening.

If you don't wanna hang out on discord you can also find me on tumblr [corpse-art](#) so feel free to swing by there :) I usually let people know around an hour in advance before a new chapter gets dropped if you're interested in that kind of thing.

-

DUDES. We have a ton of Hush Now art and I'm just shfk pls. Its amazing. You're all amazing. Go and give them some love<3

[Hush Now poster art by mothercoyote](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[Siren Design by crookederos](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[Villains by mothercoyote](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[Hoodies by mothercoyote](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[Jester vs Schlatt by owlwinter8](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[FANART MASTERPOST](#)

Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy slams his forehead down against the wheel of his stolen car, fingers curled tight around the edges of it, jaw clenching against the sound struggling its way up his throat, something between a laugh and something horribly wretched that he forces down.

"It's okay," Dream's voice echoes in the back of his mind with the memory of the strange boy who'd picked him up from the streets stumbling into the apartment, greeting dying on his lips as Dream stumbled, sinking down to his knees as Tommy's bare feet hit the floor. *"As long as we have each other everything is going to be fine, right, Tommy?"*

It's been years since Dream had told him those words, his tongue wrapping clumsily around them with laughter that bubbles like mania in his mouth as Tommy burrowed beneath him, shrugging his arm over his shoulder and clasping it to his chest, taking the brunt of the weight as he forced the other boy up and carried him with stumbling steps to the couch.

There'd been ash and soot, burnt skin wrapping up his arm, a feverish sort of haze to the green eyes that meet his when he sinks to his knees before the other, grimacing at the jagged cut that slants down between his brows, over his nose and past the edge of his mouth.

"You won't leave me, right?" A hand reaching out clumsily to be caught by Tommy's cold grip. *"Promise me, Tommy."* Voice breaking, something wet trickling down freckled cheeks as Tommy clumsily reaches out to wipe it, Dream's head turning to press his cheek into the palm of his hand. *"Promise me you'll never leave me,"* he begs, breath warm against his skin.

Tommy doubts he remembers it or the promise he'd made to the then fourteen-year-old.

Dream, had he been in his right mind, would never have voiced such an obvious weakness, to reveal the aching loneliness that clawed deep inside of him despite how much he struggled against allowing attachments, claiming them nothing more than a weakness.

"I'm not going anywhere," Tommy had promised him then, leaning forward to press his forehead against the heat of the other to a shuddering breath and eyes slipping shut.

His lime green hoodie had been a thing drenched in blood and it lands wet on the floor when Tommy finally manages to cut it off him only to find a wound bubbling dark, deep enough that there's bone visible where his shoulder had taken the brunt of it, gaping wet beneath the shining red blood.

Blood loss, a fever already wrecking his body- it had been sheer fucking *luck* that Dream had survived it at all, heat having seared a good chunk of the fabric to the wound and slowing the bleeding until he'd finally found his way with stumbling steps to their small, shared apartment.

Dream never speaks of what had happened to bring him to such a state but Tommy gathers enough between nightmares and feverish ramblings, between shaking hands and pleading, between sobs that wreck Dream's body as he clings desperately with grief and horror stark in his eyes that Tommy doesn't know how to fix.

"I didn't want to do it, I didn't want to do it- you have to believe me, Tommy, you have to-"

"HE BETRAYED ME!"

Something wretched, something broken, the loss of something Dream struggles to grasp at.

"I trusted him-"

"I thought-"

"I should have known better, he always told me-"

"He was my friend- or I thought he was I don't- I can't- he left me, Tommy, he left me and now all I have is you-"

"Maybe I was the fool all along, for thinking that he actually cared about me but I just wanted-"

"Please, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry-"

"It's all my fault."

And Tommy stays through it all, curled up beside the older boy who tracks him almost desperately whenever he has to leave the room with eyes shining with the fever from the infection ravaging his body.

It's two weeks of staying glued to Dream's side, sleeping beside him with a hand curled around the older boy's wrist, fingers pressing against his pulse, so very desperately afraid to lose him.

Dream is all he has.

"You're something else, Tommy," Dream laughs, bright and warm as Tommy clasps his hand, allowing his mentor to pull him up from the training mats and loop an arm around his neck, dragging him close in a rare show of open affection. *"The world won't know what's coming."* He's sweaty, limbs trembling, but it's all forgotten with the warmth that blossoms inside his chest as he tips forward, forcing Dream to take his weight with an arm that wraps around his chest and holds him up. *"We're going to change everything. Together."*

It's all worth it for Dream.

It has to be.

Sam and Fran's had never meant to be a permanent thing. He has enough saved from Sam's more than generous pay that there's no way he can justify staying and working when all it did

was eat up valuable time he needed to get back to Dream's side so why-

Tommy slams his forehead against the wheel, a frustrated noise bubbling out in a whine through clenched teeth.

"There's no-one in this world I trust more than you." Dream's voice brushes soft in his memories and he squeezes his eyes shut, clinging to the promise of returning to his mentor's side. *"It's a frightening thing, Tommy. The power you hold over me."*

Tommy doesn't know how long he sits there, in the cold air of his stolen car, forcing one breath after the other, ribs lowering and expanding, trembles running through him.

There's a small rustle, a zipper being pulled aside and a tiny head popping out of his rucksack to blink at him with brown eyes behind square glasses when he slowly turns his head to look.

He doesn't know what he feels, everything bubbles too thick inside of him, and he pushes tiredly at it, and then with more stubbornness that bleeds with desperation, forcing himself out from the thick waves threatening to drag him under with a parting of his lips behind his mask and a loud rasping breath.

He blinks, a hand curling into the fabric of his hoodie, over his heart.

"Giving up is the same as death." Dream's eyes are bright in his memories, adrenaline pounding through them both as Tommy pushed to his feet, blood dripping warm from his fingers as he reached for the familiar hot wrap of power with a stubborn clenching of his teeth. *"But you already know that, don't you, Tommy?"*

"Hello." Slimecicle rubs a tiny fist over his eyes. "Are you done with work now Mr. Red?"

"Yeah," Tommy forces out, pushing away from the wheel to slump back against the seat instead. "We still have some time before-" He pauses, remembering just who was sitting beside him, a small figure of bubbling green but also Jester's spy. "Do you- how about we get some ice cream?" he offers tiredly, desperate for any sort of distraction.

Slimecicle perks up. "We can?" he breathes out eagerly, small palms clapping together. "I've never had ice cream before!"

Tommy huffs a small breath, forcing himself to latch onto the idea and push everything else down. "I guess we'll have to fix that then."

-

Slimecicle tips his torso over the edge of the cup Tommy gets him, biting eagerly into a towering of soft vanilla, looking entirely too delighted when he drew back with a colourful sprinkle caught in his mouth like a pink bone that slowly gets absorbed into his mouth under Tommy's morbidly curious gaze.

He looks at his own lavender coloured ice cream, small darker chunks of dark blue, almost black bits in it and-

He thinks of snow, of laughter, of the taste of blueberries in his mouth, of the touch that bleeds through his shirt when Wilbur had sprawled down against him, warm despite the cold that melts against his skin from the snow shoved down the neck of his jacket.

He takes a large bite, ignoring the sting of his teeth and the small shiver that crawls up his spine as he takes another larger one with more aggression, something burning inside of him as he stares out over the streets of L'Manberg where they sit parked at the side of the road.

There's people moving about, hurrying over the white lined pavement with the ringing sound of the streetlights sporting a green figure preserved in hurried motion.

Businesspeople in sharp suits and fancy blouses beneath thick coats make up the majority of the crowd this close to the Hero tower that rise in a spiraling thing of white that stretches towards the sky.

A group of teens buff against each other, laughing over something they crowd close to look at on a small screen in the palms of a girl with black hair, and Tommy flicks his gaze to another that follows at their heels, head ducked with a long scaled tail that flicks behind her, only just avoiding being dragged against the dark slush on the ground.

He sucks in a breath and sinks deeper into his seat as he catches sight of thick curls of white hair and curling horns, the fancy red and gold trimmed jacket unmistakably that of the *Captain*, the tricorn proud on her head and steps sure, people pulling out of her path with whispers and wide-eyes.

There's a black mask over her eyes, detailed with faded bronze, mouth drawn tight, and he watches her until she disappears around the corner before breathing out and pushing up.

He knows, rationally, that she wouldn't recognize him like this but he and the Captain had never exactly been on good terms.

She had a sharp way of watching him whenever they were in the same room and it had made his neck prickle uncomfortable, far too aware of her.

She was a good Hero though, one of the better ones, most of her patrols far out from the city center.

His brow furrows because it was fucking *rare* that she visited the tower. She had made it no secret of how much she disliked the power plays at work and she'd made far more enemies than friends among her fellow Heroes even if the public adored her.

His instincts prickles sharply and he bites down on the last bit of ice cream, cone crunching and half-sticking out of his mouth as he reached beneath the wheel to twist the two closest cables, car rumbling to life.

-

Charlie peers up at him, palms buried into melting vanilla that clings and sticks to his skin, mouth smeared with the stuff.

“Adventure time?” he asks, sticking his entire hand into his mouth, green bubbling as his body absorbed the ice cream to slide a clean hand out with a wet *pop*.

Tommy stares at him.

“Yeah,” he manages with a curl of nausea he pretends not to feel, dragging his phone from his pocket and glancing at the time, ignoring the many missed calls on the screen with a thick swallow. “*Adventure time.*”

Tommy hauls himself into the back turns his backpack upside down on the seat, letting the things spill out.

They're in a parking garage, car crammed roughly into the darkest corner he could find, but his skin itches and prickles, far too aware that anyone could see him like this.

Slimecicle finds the round wooden toy that Techno had gotten him, stuffed away and forgotten but now being unrolled with a long string, the melting pool of ice cream forgotten as Tommy wrestles into his Hero gear inside the small space.

He tugs his hoodie in place, strapping on the vambraces and escrima sticks, his mask slotting over his mouth and nose with a breath that filters strange but familiar, comforting as he closes his eyes, chest rising and falling slowly.

He looks down with a twitch of his muscles when a small hand presses against his thigh, tiny body being hoisted up before Charlie peered up at him expectantly, toy beneath one stretched out arm.

Tommy takes it, pocketing it to a mouth that dips and then stretches wide with a glowing grin. “You’ll have to stay out of sight,” he mutters as he offers a palm, letting Charlie climb up and lifting him up to slip into the depth of his hood. “We’re meeting with a Hero.”

“I will be quiet,” Charlie says with an excited hush as Tommy pulls his black jacket on and loops the lime green scarf around his neck, tugging it carefully in place. “I promise.”

Tommy pauses before he grunts in acknowledgement.

He opens the car door and slips out, tucking his hands into his pockets and ducking his head as he kicked the door shut behind him, feeling the way Charlie shifts to hold into the edge of his hood with the motion of his body, and he clenches his jaw as he slips into the bright lit streets.

He misses the dark of the night almost immediately, his goggles tucked away in his pocket, but he tugs at his hood, shadowing his face as much as possible as he moves with easy steps, ducking and weaving through the people moving in a hurry with phones pressed to their ears and mouths moving, eyes quickly slipping off him.

There’s plenty of hybrids who hide their faces and features and Tommy knows he doesn’t stand out because of it but it’s something he only allows himself to be briefly grateful for, the reminder twisting dark in his chest.

He bares his teeth behind his mask at a father who drags his son close with a foul look shot his way.

It doesn't take long before he can take a left, disappearing into the maze of alleyways, tracing down the familiar path, slowing his steps, heart pounding inside his chest as he swallows, taking comfort in the shadows cast by the tall rising buildings around him.

The slush is nearly non-existent here but the ground is wet, water dripping from high above, pouring down to the metal drains, graffiti paintings faded on metal and old brick walls that the fancy fronts of the buildings cover up on the main street.

The remains of what had been before L'Manberg's rise of Heroes, hidden away, almost as if the city was ashamed of its past.

A city built by Villains, that's what L'Manberg is, or so Dream claimed with a dip of his brow and something unreadable in his eyes as he traced over the lettering of one of his many old books.

There's rumours of an old underground railstation hidden somewhere deep below too but if it exists there were no-one who had come forward with any proof.

There's rough metal trash bins here with peeling paint, hidden away from the bright streets of motion and life, and his eyes dart automatically to search for the rustling motion of fur, brightening as he sees a tabby peering out with wide golden eyes beneath an abandoned cardboard box.

"Tabby cats are one of the most common species out there," Dream's voice ghosts in the back of his mind and Tommy remembers himself, nine and staring at the small kitten held close to the other boy's chest with wide-eyes. *"Come here, she won't bite, I promise."* Tommy had taken a careful step forward. *"Unlike you,"* Dream had teased when he reached out to carefully brush his fingers over achingly soft fur to a high-pitched meow and a low rumbling purr when he rubs down between triangular ears.

He halts before he can think twice about it, suddenly regretting not bringing a can of tuna with him, a guilt that settles strangely heavy in his chest as it slowly shifts forwards, spine a fluid thing as it moves from beneath the dumpster, nose twitching and paws momentarily pausing as he instinctively sinks to his haunches.

"Hello there pretty thing," he pitches softly, offering his hand out as it chirps, ducking to stroke beneath his fingers, encouraging his palm down its spine in a heavy stroke, tail high and flicking from side to side, orange and white winding together, dirty with grit that clings to it. "It can't have been easy, getting through this winter, huh?" he murmurs softly as his fingers dips to scratch beneath its chin to a slow lidded blink. "You're strong though, surviving despite the cold."

He pulls his phone from his pocket with his other hand, checking the time and-

There's still ten minutes before Chronos had claimed Sappnap would be in place and he stuffs it back before dropping down on his knees, uncaring of the cold wetness that seeps through

his pants.

The cat wastes no time to press up on its hindlegs, a small wet nose brushing over his cheek before disappearing into his hoodie.

There's a squeak, cat shying back in surprise, blinking wide dilated eyes with claws that curls into his jacket as one paw raised in an unsure curl.

"It's okay." Tommy strokes a hand down its back, voice low and rough. "He's just a slime, he won't hurt you."

"I'm Charlie Slimecicle of Las Nevadas!" The slime reaches out a tiny hand to a small pink nose that slowly presses against his palm with a blink, ears flickering. "And you're a very big cat!" He sounds delighted, his voice a hush as it ducks, just enough for him to brush tiny fingers over the soft fur on the top of its nose, a soft questioning meow leaving it and-

Tommy draws a breath, slouching forward, one arm curling gently around the cat's body, pulling it closer and inhaling the scent of the streets clinging to it, fingers sliding through thick fur in a rhythmic soothing thing as it shifted to rub against his jaw and neck, purring up a storm under the attention.

He allows himself the time to breathe, to grasp for sanity in the tumbling, tugging grip of his thoughts going too fast with the buzz of another missed call in his pocket.

He checks the time once more behind the cat's back- counting two minutes with the flick of the last number, fingers clenching tight as it buzzes with another call.

The contact picture Wilbur had taken of them both stares back at him, Tommy caught with his face crammed up beside a wildly grinning Wilbur who stands half-folded around him, chin pressing down against the top of his head, and his heart aches.

He swallows thickly against the guilt that curls leaden and horrible inside his chest before he steels himself with a clenching of his teeth and gently loosens his hold, pushing at the tabby until it reluctantly hits the dirty ground with all four paws and he pushes off the ground to rise tall.

He turns off the buzzing off his phone before pocketing it.

Tommy steps past golden eyes and a twitching tail of white and orange, Charlie melting back into the shadows of his hoodie as he settles his shoulders and raises his chin, trailing the pads of his fingers against the brick walls of the building beside him, steps near soundless as he falls into a prowl, tabby at his side.

Two months.

Sapnap better have one hell of an explanation, Tommy thinks as he rounds the corner, only to halt, staring at the crouched figure.

“What the fuck do you mean he quit?” Wilbur’s voice is sharp and dangerous through the phone and Sam’s mouth thins, eyes flicking to the door that had closed shut behind Tommy’s tense shoulders almost two hours ago.

Quackity is tapping a rhythmic impatient pattern against his thigh, speaking in a low sharp tone to someone on the phone, Niki opposite him with a small Charlie who was happily nibbling on one of the penguin shaped cookies Sam had placed out for them.

“There’s not much else I can tell you,” Sam admits, breathing out as he reached up to pinch the bridge of his nose. “He was...” He frowns, aware of the sharp danger brewing on the other side of the phone. “He was spacing out all morning, clearly anxious about something, and then he just quit. Gave no explanation or anything. I gave him 5 minutes, to see if he’d come back.” A pause, a breath. “Fran couldn’t find any trace of him.”

“He knows how to drive,” Quackity flicks his gaze up, fingers pressing over the mouth of his phone. “And hotwire a fucking *car*. Kid could have just taken off somewhere to work through whatever.” He waves a dismissive hand but Sam has known Quackity for *years* now.

He might not be his son in blood but Sam loves him, knows him, and there’s something on his mind, something beyond Chronos and the whole mess with Red Chaos who was leaving more questions than answers in his path.

There’s a telling stilling of motion on the other side of the phone and Sam flicks his gaze to Niki who inclines her head at the silent question and Sam allows himself a moment of relief.

Wilbur wasn’t on his own then- either Technoblade or Philza was with him, that was good.

“He wouldn’t just leave.” And Wilbur sounds so sure that Sam doesn’t dare to tell him that Tommy had been a flight risk from day one, clearly haunted by something in his past with the hunching of his shoulders, still pulled sharply towards something or rather *someone*.

Too young for such a heavy thing in his gaze, thin and withdrawn with the curling of his lips.

Quackity had been the same way when Sam met him- his past tied with the man who had risen to become the Number One Hero and then Number Two with Dream’s climb up the ranks.

Schlatt had left his marks on Quackity, no matter how much his son tried to deny it, a hurt that wired deep inside of him with anger that flared dark and violent.

It had been years and yet it remained just as curling and prickling with the tension in his shoulders, a brooding sort gnawing desire to get *even* that had only intensified with Schlatt in a position where he, by all reason, shouldn’t be.

Sam frowns.

“The only thing we know right now is that he’s missing,” Sam says instead of lingering on the past, dragging a palm down the back of his neck. “He could just be gathering his thoughts, he’s a teenager and he’s been under a lot of stress with everything happening-“

“That’s-” Wilbur’s answer gets abruptly cut off, mouthpiece covered to leave Sam with something muffled and sharp, an argument that fades into the background as Sam absently reaches down to stroke a hand over Fran’s head where she’s leaning against his thigh.

“Thank you for calling us, Sam.” Philza’s smooth voice makes him straighten up. *“Have you received any news on Red Chaos?”*

Ah. Back to business then.

“Nothing,” Sam admits grimly with a glance towards the slime kicking his small legs. “Slimecicle left a piece of himself on him but Red Chaos appears to have won it over.” He glances at Quackity who has slumped back, head tilted back with a complicated tense line of his lips that curl with the scar that dip the side of it. “At most we have an assurance that if anything happens to him the small Charlie will alert us.”

It’s not much but with Red Chaos in the midst of things anything that allows them even a hint of what’s going on is worth gold as far as information goes.

The former Hero still largely remains a mystery and whatever Quackity had gathered from their meeting in Las Nevadas is being kept quiet and Sam had yet to speak to Technoblade or Philza in person to get the whole picture from the day before.

There had been no time with Chronos passed out on the upper floor of his café, the aftermath of Schlatt whose lava had spilled hot over the ground of Las Nevadas, ground shaking with Foolish rustling himself awake from his slumber, the news media leaving a tense storm in its path.

“There’s...” Fran nudges against his hand and he twists it to scratch his fingers beneath her jaw with a breath. “There’s rumours of Heroes being called in from the outer districts,” Sam settles on finally. “Quackity is working on getting confirmation on how many are being routed in, and what the official reason is, but-“

“There’s a chance they’re going for Red Chaos,” Philza finishes, his tone mild and impossible to read over the call and distantly Sam hears the tap of a clawed finger against something wooden. *“Techno thinks there’s reason to believe that he knows more than he’s letting on but that he was defensive enough that Dream might have intentionally left him out of the loop.”*

Techno was good at picking apart his enemies with sharp words, his statue and aura only adding to the sense of danger that clung thick to him, and Red Chaos might have been a Hero but he’d been all alone on enemy territory with an injured Vigilante and that was enough to unsettle anybody.

Especially someone who wasn’t used to working on his own, always at Dream’s side like a shadow, as faithful and loyal as a dog.

He glances down at Fran who blinks up at him with large golden eyes and his mouth curls wryly.

“We need him to talk,” Sam leans back in his chair, eyes on the door Tommy had disappeared out of, chest aching but knowing that he had more important things to focus on. “Figure out exactly how much he knows.”

“We do,” Philza agrees and the tapping halts. *“Whatever the Heroes are trying to cover up by getting to him first isn’t something we can allow.”*

“Which means we have to get to him first,” Sam concludes with a hum as he pushes off his chair, meeting Quackity’s lingering look with a raised brow that gains him a deaf shake of his head and a frown.

“I’m heading back to Las Nevadas.” Quackity glances at Niki who hums, head tilting as she offers her palm to the small Slimecicle who wastes no time to climb into her palm, cradled gently.

“I’ll come with you,” she offers with a flickered look at Sam. “Meeting tonight?”

“At eleven,” Philza confirms over the phone and Sam relies it back to the two.

Quackity offers a wave over his shoulder and Niki spares him a smile, following at his heel as she slipped Charlie into the pocket of her coat, bell ringing above them both as they stepped into the sun melting the snow on the streets.

January weather was always unpredictable, swinging between the beginning spring heat and snowstorms at the flip of a hand, and it feels like a false promise where it shines bright outside the windows of his café.

“What about Tommy?” Sam dares to ask, because he’d taken him in and now he’s disappeared and he feels responsible for the situation he’d drawn him into despite his best intentions.

“We’ll deal with him,” Philza answers mildly and there’s a promise there that sends a shiver of dread up his spine.

“He might come back on his own,” Sam offers weakly, despite knowing there’s no point to it.

The situation is out of his hands.

Wilbur had laid his claim on Tommy and if the boy was smart he’d come back on his own before the situation could escalate.

Red Chaos was offering a distraction but it wasn’t one that would last forever, not with the Syndicate actively hunting for him.

“Perhaps,” Philza allows. *“See you tonight.”*

He ends the call and Sam let’s out a rough breath, lowering his phone down, staring at the screen for a long moment before pocketing it.

The café is empty and he crosses the floor silently, the wood strangely hollow beneath his feet as he pauses, locking it shut and pressing the small button to allow the rattling metal to fall over the windows, darkening the already dim lightning of the café.

He parts his lips, tasting gunpowder on his breath with a sharp exhale, letting scales crawl dark down his throat and pattern up his face with the brightening glow of his eyes.

Fran whines, tail wagging unsurely.

“I know, I’m sorry,” he murmurs as he kneels down in front of her, gently stroking his palms over her soft white fur to frame her face. “I know I keep promising each mission will be the last, but they need the Warden far more than they need Sam right now.”

He gives her one last stroke before straightening up. “Come on, you can stay with Karl, alright? Guard him for Quackity.”

His steps feels heavy as he leaves the familiar comfort of his small café, stepping up the stairs to the door that opens with a twist of the bronze handle.

Fran presses past him, nosing up the first door on the left and disappearing into it, and Sam pulls it shut as he passes it by, shoulders straightening and steps growing firmer as he opens the door on the right and steps into the room.

The Warden’s uniform waits for him – golden armour, a dark green gasmask that stretches up to hide his face, trident gleaming sharp with a promise of violence where it leans propped against it.

It has been almost two years since he had his first encounter with Red Chaos, the Hero’s eyes wide and hands wet with blood, clawing desperately at the metal that had gone straight through him, pinning him like a bug to the ground with a choked gasped breath behind his mask.

The Warden reaches out to grasp the same trident tight, giving it a spin before the end clacked down against the floor with a roll of his shoulders, gunpowder smoldering in his chest.

He’s hunted the Hero down once, spared him, choosing mercy where there had no business being any.

He’s not about to make the same mistake again.

Chapter End Notes

Dudududu~

Ayo guys, welcome back to the story where I bring you all the Sam content you've been craving! Maybe. Sorta? Yes?? I'm giving you Sam content and that's all that matters.

It's all good vibes here.

I've done a small tag overhaul so feel free to check those over - it's not a big change but Charlie wasn't even tagged so I, uh, had to fix that, yeh.

Sending you all my love and adoration, I hope you're all having a wonderful day/night wherever this Hush Now chapter finds you :)

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In honour of hitting 8k kudos (and we're somehow at 9k now??) I've started up a discord server for Hush Now so- if you guys are interested in that, here's a link [Hush Now Discord](#)

There's a discussion channel for Hush in general, and one for the newest chapter, so keep an eye on that if you want to avoid spoilers and be mindful of each other, alright? And if there's any issue don't be afraid to reach out - my mods and I are still working out the kinks of it to make sure it's all good vibes.

We also do event chats for MCC and that kind of stuff and movie nights now, apparently. So there's a bit of everything happening.

If you don't wanna hang out on discord you can also find me on tumblr [corpse-art](#) so feel free to swing by there :) I usually let people know around an hour in advance before a new chapter gets dropped if you're interested in that kind of thing.

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DUDES. We have a ton of Hush Now art and I'm just shfk pls. Its amazing. You're all amazing. Go and give them some love<3

[Codependency through tht years by eelsdancingonpluto](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[He's on an Adventure by mothercoyote](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[Royal Flush by owlwinter8](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[Oh why by pussboyapologist](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[FANART MASTERPOST](#)

Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“- latest news, Heroes are being called in from all over L’Manberg-“

“We haven’t yet been given a reason but there’s speculation about it relating to the sudden return of Red Chaos-”

“- Schlatt did what no-one else dared to do! Las Nevadas is being run by a Villain and it’s only right-“

“-no news on the Vigilante Chronos and some fear that Red Chaos are keeping him captive right this minute-“

“He’s a Vigilante but Chronos has always done good by us! Whatever Red Chaos is doing- he has to be stopped before the situation can escalate and his search for vengeance has him targeting our very own Heroes!”

“-I really think that Red Chaos could be going after Dream? Of course I do! Red Chaos was after the Number One spot from the very beginning, I’ve had my eyes on him, suspicious from the very beginning I was, but Dream was simply too smart for him! And now look at the guy, working with Villains? We’ve been strung along like fools but no more!”

“Where is Dream? The unrest in the public has been a continuous thing ever since Red Chaos’ betrayal-“

“I feel for the guy, I really do, but Dream needs to step up and handle the situation and not just leave it to Schlatt to tidy up his failures or he has no business being the Number One Hero-“

-

“What do you think is really going on?”

Tubbo blinks, glancing up from the news he’d been half-heartedly scanning through, focusing on Ranboo who is back in his hybrid form, skin and hair split in black and white, mismatched red and green eyes glowing softly in the dark shadows of the room from blinds pulled all the way down.

There’s a lengthening stretch of his skin and limbs, something awkward in the too broad split of his mouth where sharp teeth rests, tail flicking restlessly with a soft tuft of white that Enderpearl tracks with pinprick eyes.

“With what?” he asks finally, turning his phone off and sliding it away as he pushed up from the lazy half-sprawl, legs folding as he turned towards his platonic husband.

Husband. It still feels strangely heady, a joke that had turned into reality, a golden band looping around his ring finger, a promise of having each other's backs through thick and thin.

Tubbo may owe his life to Quackity, but he owes his sanity to Ranboo with his awkward smiles, awful puns and a genuine desperate desire to help even when he'd been barely coping with his own mess of things.

Ranboo is... a comfort that Tubbo carefully allows himself, a calculated risk that had paid off.

His husband's long black fingers twitches, sharp claws curling carefully, tucked against his palm and out of sight.

"With Dream and Red Chaos," he says slowly, tasting the words carefully with a nervous twitch of his ear.

Tubbo hums, digging the heels of his palms down against his thighs as he stretched out his spine, letting his head tip back, allowing Ranboo to study him without the pressure of accidentally meeting his eyes even through the thick bangs he was growing to cover them.

"I mean-" Ranboo picks up, predictably as the silence grows between them. "I mean there's something odd about it all, isn't there? I feel like I'm going insane, looking for pieces that aren't really there, and I don't want to say anything and be *wrong* but-" A breath, a rough swallow. "Techno said that the Heroes are all gathering up, Wilbur still isn't talking, and Red Chaos just- I mean, *Las Nevadas*?"

His ears fold flat and Tubbo stares up at the ceiling, lips drawing into a thoughtful line.

"It wasn't the worst choice he could have made, it *is* neutral grounds after all." Tubbo rubs his fingers against the fabric of the covers as his brow dips. "It is odd though, that Schlatt would breach the laws of Las Nevadas in an attempt to get to Red Chaos."

No one had made an attempt at Las Nevadas since its rise- the laws were too solid and Jester's grasp on it too tight, his system of favours and gold allowing him to secure loyalties among Heroes and Villains alike.

Neutral grounds, something that wasn't supposed to be possible among the escalating violence, and Jester had been busy playing damage control since Schlatt put his fancy shoes on the ground, the media raising questions that Jester wouldn't answer.

Couldn't, in some ways.

He was a Villain after all, there would always be a dissonance between him and the rest of the public, no matter the interest and awe Las Nevadas drew with its neon lights and the rustling of slot machines inside the golden webbed dome.

Jester might rule Las Nevadas, but it was all possible thanks to Foolish whose gold wrapped through its walls and floor, a living trap that those who visited Las Nevadas had no idea of.

And it wasn't for Foolish he'd have even more of a mess to deal with.

But the Golden Man of Las Nevadas shaking himself awake from his resting slumber as a statue to deal with the threat had drawn a lot of the attention from Jester with speculations going wild, Tubbo tracking it all with interest.

It was amusing because his first impression of Foolish that he was a strange guy whose mind bounced from one direction to another, often interrupting himself mid-conversation to mutter to himself as he scratched ideas down on whatever surface happened to be near him.

Jester habitually kept a notebook on him to keep the ancient from scrawling on his tables, walls or even floors when the mood struck him.

Tubbo had first met Foolish when the shark man was half-hanging from a chandelier in the backroom Jester used for his meetings, legs hooked awkwardly around the top as he corrected the slant on one of the diamonds with furious muttering, Charlie standing beneath with his arms spread to catch him if he fell and Jester tapping his foot with exasperation (and worry, Tubbo had thought personally, observing the strange Villain and the dip of his mouth, because Jester cared more than he was willing to admit, a weakness in the world he'd claimed a place in).

"It was quite the return," he allows, flicking his right ear thoughtfully. "... He might have gotten away with it if it wasn't for Schlatt." His mouth twists around the name, something wrapping heavy in his chest.

Tubbo remembers how he'd been when Schlatt first spread his grin with too white teeth barely visible behind his lips— a politicians smile as a hand pressed against his back, the other gesturing broadly into the fancy penthouse suit where riches were written into every corner, painting a stark picture of something empty and bare for all that things crowded around him.

He'd been wide-eyed and a bit awed, not sure why the Number Two Hero had picked him out of all the children but so very eager to prove himself with a bee plush hugged tight to his chest.

"Fourteen is too old for those childish things," Schlatt had scoffed as pushed Tubbo into his new room, eyeing the bee plush he'd torn out of his arms with open scorn.

And Tubbo had been unable to do anything as lava circled hot around the Hero's horns, bubbling up his palm to eat through the plush that had been with him for years.

Schlatt had thought that taking in an orphan would raise his status in the eyes of the world and Tubbo had spent a year under his harsh tutelage, in suits that felt starched and ill-fit on his shoulders, learning how to stand, how to speak, how to gesture, when to be silent and when to talk.

More often than not Schlatt demanded his silence, leaving Tubbo to curl up as far away as he could on the white couch as he watched the Hero consume wine glass after wine glass with Dream's face on the television, the world following the steps of the then Number Two Hero with hungry eyes.

He'd come to hate those evenings, even as he learned to anticipate the way Schlatt's mood would fall, danger brewing in the way black nails trailed over the armrest of the couch, the first glow of lava licking up the curling horns, so very different from Tubbo's own short stubs barely visible and still growing.

He'd never hated being a hybrid but Schlatt had made him resent the likeness he saw in himself in the Hero as an arm wrapped around his shoulders in front of the large mirror, studied, carefully approved, but-

There'd also been something in him that desperately craved the approval, fingers aching after hours upon hours spent hunched over a desk, carefully perfecting his handwriting to a palm that settled on his shoulder with a squeeze and a breath of smoky approval, something that left him nauseous, staring into the mirror in the large apartment Schlatt left him in for hours at a time, wondering who he was turning into.

It had been just days before Tubbo was about to be introduced to the world that Red Chaos had stepped onto the scene, a silent shadow behind his mentor, red hoodie just as baggy, a mask slotting over his jaw and up his nose, a single curl of blond hair visible just above red goggles and an easy secure confidence in the lines of his shoulders.

A man whose powers burned red where Dream's burned green, a match that had the world clawing to know more, eager and hungry to learn about a Hero that claimed no rank, content to just be a sidekick, something that earned him both admiration, scorn and mockery.

Like two sides of the same coin, Tubbo remembers thinking the first he'd seen Dream and Red Chaos in action together, perfectly anticipating each other, a trust that he found himself aching for as he heard the slam of Schlatt's door, shoulders curling instinctively, making himself smaller as a bottle of whiskey was slammed harshly onto the marble counter.

There'd been a crack, glass splintering, amber liquid spilling to drip down the edge onto the floor, and Tubbo had known what Schlatt was thinking before those dark eyes settled on him.

There's still third-degree scars on his body that Ranboo helped him with every night and morning, the skin stiff, almost shining in places where it twisted roughly in others, and Tubbo supposes he's lucky that it'd stayed in places that were easy to hide as he buttoned his shirts up in the morning.

"Shit- shit you have to stay awake kid, please, fuck-"

Quackity had been the one to get him out but even then, free from Schlatt, there'd been a part of him that felt aimless and directionless without Schlatt's rules and hard-earned approval, something that followed even when he was enrolled back into school, a place that he'd once loved for but now felt strange after two years with the Hero, students streaming past him in the hallways to a rhythm he'd lost.

He'd been lucky that Jester was patient with him, even when Tubbo lashed out, his powers dark thorny vines that curled into every corner of his apartment as he drank shot after shot of the whiskey he'd stolen from Quackity's cupboard.

The man had gotten rid of all alcohol after that and where Tubbo had anticipated violence the Villain had merely sighed, folding down on the living room floor and patting the place beside him.

“Look, I’m not good with this alright? But, shit, you can’t let him get into your head like this.”

A world famed Villain, the owner of Las Nevadas, on the floor with the underside of his fancy shoes pressing a dirty print against his fancy black pants, small buttery yellow wings ruffling on his back, mouth tipping in a grimace that pulled at the scar that split over his eye to pull at the corner of his mouth.

Schlatt wouldn’t have been caught dead in the same position, often mocking as Dream was caught doing an interview seated on the curb as Red Chaos lurked behind him, watchful and guarding the other Hero

Like a dog.

“You don’t want to turn out like him when you have your own perfectly good shoes to grow into, kid.”

Tubbo had been fifteen when Red Chaos stepped onto the scene and it’s the only thing that keeps him from being forever tied to Schlatt, hidden away instead of being marketed like some kind of fancy prop as the man decides to try and make a sidekick out of him, envious of the loyalty that Red Chaos offers so easily to Dream and desperately desiring it for himself.

He’s sixteen when Quackity drags him out, burns wrapping up his chest and shoulders, around his thigh, his nose thick with the scent of his own burning flesh.

He’s sixteen the first time he meets Ranboo who is all tall and gangly, oozing nervous skittish energy, ears drawing back and eyes flicking past his shoulder, flinching when the Blood God awkwardly pats his shoulder in reassurance, red eyes heavy and judging as they study Tubbo’s small stature before dragging to Jester who cocks his head with a challenging grin, tension heavy in his shoulders but refusing to back down.

If Tubbo remembers all too well the reek of alcohol and smoke, Ranboo’s memory is a sieve and he struggles in desperately piecing together scraps in the memory book he always keeps on his person, waking from violent dreams only to immediately forget, arms wrapping around his chest as he hunched on himself, trembling as he gasped for breath.

“Why did you take him in?” Tubbo had asked only once as Techno sat reading at the table of the apartment he’d had before he and Ranboo moved together, tea boiling on the stove.

Ranboo sleeps deeply in his bed after days away only to be found with his pupils glowing purple and looking down at the water from the top of a bridge.

“You’re all about threat assessment and all that stuff, and someone like Ranboo is a weakness, easily exploitable.”

They both know Ranboo keeps a list of people that he can trust at the very front of his book.

They both know how easy it would be to forge Ranboo's handwriting.

"He comes from the same place I do," Techno had said, mouth pulling and tusks gleaming as blood red eyes locked onto his, one hand coming up to rub against the back of his neck with a huffed breath. *"He had as much choice in it as you had with being chosen by Schlatt. It's on the government, not the two of you, and where it has failed you, the Syndicate will not."*

It's a pretty enough sentiment, Tubbo supposes.

In some ways Tubbo thinks that Red Chaos saved him and the thought of Schlatt being after the former Hero makes something uncomfortable curl in his gut for all that it feels like a foolish sentiment.

But he also can't forget the picture of the Hero crouched over Wilbur, gun tight in a bloody grip, face hidden in the shadows of his hood as he levelled it against the man he had followed with a dogged sort of loyalty for all the world to see for two years.

Tubbo might not officially get invited into Syndicate meetings but there were allowances made thanks to Jester vouching for him.

"He's already involved," Jester had said, arms crossed and leaning back against the wall with a false sort of relaxation. *"Let the kid make his own decisions, he's already been robbed of enough chances to make them."*

So he'd sit in, listening, quiet and fading into the background, quickly going forgotten save for a knowing lingering look from Jester who sprawls out and drags the attention to himself with a flourished expertise.

Tubbo had a notebook on every mission Red Chaos had made, official and unofficial, paths crossing with the Syndicate on occasions that never makes the news.

Tubbo had sworn off the Hero and Villain business but he can't deny that there's a part of him that doesn't want to stay away, not as long as Schlatt is the Number Two Hero.

He wants the man gone.

Tubbo knows that Red Chaos had a notoriously bad relationship with Schlatt, the Syndicate had enough eyes in the Hero tower to know that much, and there were rumours of the former Hero having interfered on more than one occasion between the Number One and Two which made Dream and Schlatt seen together all the more *strange*.

He honestly just... wants to have a talk with Red Chaos. Meet him. Make his own impression of the guy and see what makes him tick.

"Mhm." Tubbo can feel Ranboo's gaze on him but pretends not to as he studies a dark spot on the ceiling. "Some might say it was *foolish* to challenge Las Nevadas."

"'Boo."

“I’m just saying.” There’s a lilt of satisfaction in Ranboo’s voice and Tubbo laughs despite himself as he tips back to sprawl out. “Do you think that Dream might go after Wilbur again?”

“I don’t know,” Tubbo admits honestly. “Possibly. There has to be a reason he went after Siren that night, right?”

“Mmm, I think so too.” There’s a curl of anxiousness in Ranboo’s voice that makes him turn his head, peering at the taller boy through the thick fringe of his hair, studying the curl of his mouth and ears pinned flat, the tuft of his tail being chewed on by a satisfied Enderpearl. “There’s something strange going on.”

“Yeah,” Tubbo agrees, brow furrowing thoughtfully. “Dream has been consistent as a Hero ever since he stepped onto the scene and I don’t think he could have faked all of that.” Because Dream had nearly died when scrambling to save the lives of Villains, disappearing for weeks when someone had died on his watch, and for all of that to have been some elaborate *scheme*— it felt too sudden, too out of the blue, and the pieces just didn’t add up. “And if he *did* then how does Red Chaos fit into all of this?”

“Poor guy has the whole of L’Manberg hunting for him.” Ranboo’s discomfort is clear, and Tubbo knows that for all he admires Techno, the other boy would never be comfortable with violence and the lengths the Syndicate goes to when it comes to getting hold of information.

Tubbo is the more pragmatic out of the two of them and he can’t deny the logic of it for all that the thought of the Blood God actively going after Red Chaos makes something of similar sentiment crawl down his spine.

The former Hero had saved Wilbur’s life and he knows that Techno honours favours and debts, even unacknowledged ones. He was also ruthlessly fair in his dealings. The unofficial Syndicate leader wouldn’t kill Red Chaos, not unless he didn’t have a choice, but he wants information and there’s always the matter of what lengths he’d go for that information.

Especially if there was still a risk of Dream going after Siren again.

He has to admit he’d rather the Syndicate tracked Red Chaos down over Schlatt, all things considered, and he’s not sure if that makes him a good person or not.

Tubbo has some personal investment in getting Red Chaos to the Syndicate as well so perhaps it just makes him human.

“It’s a game of cat and mouse.” Tubbo stretches out his legs. “It’s just a matter of who finds him first at this point.”

He hopes, for Red Chaos’ sake, that it’s the Blood God and not the Warden who finds him first.

“What do you think he’s up to?” Ranboo tilts his head. “I mean, he went to Chronos so he has to be looking for information as well, right? Do you think Karl told him anything?”

“We’ll know when Chronos wakes up,” Tubbo answers evasively.

Personally he thought that it was quite a sure thing that Chronos had told Red Chaos something of interest or Karl would never have shown up at that meeting. *What* exactly it was that he thought was so important to tell the former Hero was another thing entirely.

The Vigilante was lucky that Jester was an overprotective bastard who guarded those he considered *his* with viciousness but Chronos was in for one hell of a time once he woke up.

Ranboo considers him with a low hum.

“You talked with Philza earlier, right?”

Tubbo tilts his head. “I did.”

“Any news on Tommy?”

And- *oh*.

Tubbo takes in the twists of Ranboo’s fingers tangled together, the way his shoulders hunches and lips curls down unsurely, as if he wasn’t supposed to ask.

He doesn’t blame Tommy for making his own choices, the boy was wary and distrustful in a way that reminded him of himself, and yet not.

“He’s a strange boy, that one.” That’s what Philza had mused thoughtfully in their kitchen, eyes unreadable as he stared towards the hallway Tommy had ducked down with a clenching of his jaw and something desperate flashing in eerie bright blue eyes. *“He clings so very desperately, as if he’s forgotten what it’s like to be just himself, perhaps even to the point that it terrifies him. It’s a dangerous mindset, especially in one so young.”*

He sees part of who he had been under Schlatt in Tommy who stands rigid with clenched fists and fury glowing bright, mouth pulling down, angry and unsure of his place in the world, and Tubbo hadn’t been able to keep himself from ducking out the kitchen and trail after him with a flicked look at the curl of Philza’s lips and a tip of his chin.

Because it doesn’t feel the same, not really, and Tubbo wants to know *why*.

There’s softness obvious in Tommy’s bright gaze when Enderchest brushed up against him, and he angles his gaze up to seek reassurance in Techno, not rules and allowances, and there’s something stubborn and desperate in the shadows of the blue of his eyes when his mouth curls around Wilbur’s name.

Tommy falls willingly into new arms where Tubbo struggles to still free himself from what had been, closing himself shut, cautious and wary about the allowances he makes and determined to stand on his own.

But despite that his curiosity is caught and he wants to pry Tommy open, wants to know why he’s so different when he sees so much of himself in the younger boy.

Ranboo had detailed as much as he remembered of their conversation and Tubbo loves his husband, he does, but sometimes he's clumsy in the sentiment he's going for.

Techno is very protective of his family – the Blood God won't hesitate to kill you if you hurt Wilbur.

I don't know you, Tommy – I want to get to know you.

We're a close bunch and I'd hate for us to get off on the wrong foot – I'm sorry we didn't meet under better circumstances, but I really want to be your friend, and I'm not the only one, we're all curious about you.

It would be easier for you – the Syndicate treats its friends well, you don't want to be on the wrong side, it's nothing personal.

Ranboo's attempts at diplomacy doesn't always go right and Tubbo could see how someone as prickly as Tommy hadn't reacted well to it, even if the younger boy was making things needlessly complicated for himself without knowing it.

"Nothing yet." Tubbo stretches his arms up, spreading his fingers, studying the small, healed scars barely visible and the awkward wrap of a thin burn around his thumb. "But it's only a matter of time."

Because Wilbur wouldn't just allow the boy to disappear.

Tubbo finds himself wondering if Tommy really wanted to leave at all as he drags a thumb over the burn scar, mouth curling down.

"I'm worried," Ranboo admits, red and green eyes flickering to the window before he breathes out.

A shiver running through him, black and white slowly bleeding out of his skin and hair to leave an odd colour that sometimes looked dark blonde, sometimes light brown, and then sometimes, in the right light, Tubbo thought it looked rather like a brownish kind of red that caught prettily in the rays.

The cracks of his limbs are less pleasant, Ranboo's face twisting in a grimace, Enderpearl making a mournful sound as the tail curled to disappear up the back of Ranboo's shirt where it looped around his midriff.

Tubbo doesn't think he'll ever tire of seeing it. Ranboo is something... abnormal, one of a kind, and there's a part of him that itches to poke and prod in an attempt to understand.

There's still small points to his ears but the colour of his eyes dulls and when his lips parts in a sigh there's still two rows of too sharp teeth.

"Wilbur wouldn't hurt him," Tubbo answers after a long moment.

Ranboo's head tips. "Are you sure?"

Tubbo pursues his lips. “Wilbur wouldn’t *knowingly* hurt him,” he amends.

Because there’s no telling where on the playing field Tommy is standing or what kind of person had drawn his steps away from Wilbur when the desperate desire to cling to the man was so naked in his eyes.

Tubbo personally finds the whole thing awfully suspicious with the timing of Heroes being drawn back to the tower and Red Chaos return.

He knows he’s not the only one making guesses and assumptions and he can only hope he’s wrong.

Tommy’s neck had been bare of a mark but that doesn’t mean that the Hero commission hadn’t found another way to recruit child soldiers into their ranks, didn’t remove the fact that another Hero could have gotten it into their head to make of Tommy what Schlatt had tried to make of him.

Or a Villain for that matter. The Hero side wasn’t the only ones preparing for war.

There’s a knock on their front door, distant and barely heard, and Tubbo observes the way Ranboo’s face brightens even as he reaches for his mask, a split of black and white that settles over his mouth with an easy motion.

“Come in!” Ranboo shouts as he slides off the bed, snagging one of his flower printed button-ups and shrugging it on mid-motion.

The door closes shut behind him and Tubbo dips his gaze down to Enderchest who is staring at him with unforgiving eyes, tail flicking behind her where she sits on the floor.

“You liked him as well, didn’t you, girl?” She stands up, crouching only briefly before making an elegant jump for the window where she paws at the closed blinds with a dissatisfied look his way. “Right, right.”

Tubbo rolls himself off the bed, smoothing his shirt down half-heartedly before reaching to free the window sight, wincing at the bright light as it cast into the room.

Enderchest seats herself, eyes carefully focused outside, eyes bright and golden.

Tubbo reaches out and carefully runs a hand down her back to a flick of her right ear. But she begrudgingly endures it as he stares out beside her, at the snow melting on the streets, the warmth bleeding through his shirt to settle against his skin to an uncomfortable shiver.

He’d hated the cold when he was younger and it’s strange to realize that he’s already missing the snow and it’s prickling touch, one arm drawing against his chest to curl over his heart as he breathes out a sigh.

-

“I found the whole situation sketchy from the beginning-“

“I mean, I think we all knew that Dream’s ideas was just a publicity stunt. The whole no-killing things sounds pretty but sometimes you just have to raise the gun and put a bullet into the head of traitors, you feel me? I certainly wouldn’t blame Dream for making an exception. Red Chaos had us all fooled-“

“I like Schlatt but man won’t stand a chance against Red Chaos. Just fucking look at his powers, man! The only one who’ll be able to take Red Chaos down is Dream himself and he’s hiding away in the tower like a fucking coward-“

“I don’t think any of us really expected it. Red Chaos has been unwaveringly loyal, I just- I just don’t want to think he’d really betray us all like that. That he’d betray Dream-”

“Red Chaos saved my life! He’s a good man and an even better Hero and he needs us more than ever-”

“I feel like we aren’t giving him the benefit of the doubt... There’s still so much we don’t know, so many questions that needs to be answered-“

“I’m just feeling done with all of this. Do we even need Heroes if this is going to be what we deal with? If we can’t even trust those sworn to protect us then what do we have-?”

“Disgusting is what it is, to think that he could get away with all of this. Dream! Dream if you’re seeing this know that we have your back! We won’t let the traitor get away with this! We wont! I- we might not have powers like you but we’ll be your eyes and ears on the ground and help you find him so you can make this right-“

“Dream is naïve, what we need is to return to Schlatt iron rules and-“ ---- “FUCK SCHLATT! SUPPORT DREAM! This is all a conspiracy so smudge Dream’s name and Schlatt is nothing but a fucking power hungry drunk who I bet is behind all of this, you’re all just to blind to- hey HEY LET GO OFF ME IT’S MY RIGHT TO-“

“I owe everything to Dream, and he has my full support in this, but I’d- I’d really like to see him here, you know? It’s not that I’m doubting him or anything but you have to understand-“

"His failure in dealing with Red Chaos-"

“The Syndicate has been awfully quiet as well. A coincidence? I think not-“

-

“This is ridiculous.” Eret glances at Puffy beside them as the older Hero folds her arms across her chest, eyes unimpressed and suspicious as she flickered her gaze around the community floor crowding with Heroes from all around the corners of L’Manberg.

She’s an impressive figure, even here, white curls wild and unbound, horns curling dangerously on either side of her tricorne.

She had once confided in them that she’d picked the pirate outfit in an attempt to distract and soothe children and Eret supposes it’s a fanciful sentiment – they’d be rather distracted if a

pirate dropped onto the scene as well.

There's Heroes Eret hasn't seen in years seated on couches and accepting the bubbling drinks served with the bottom halves of their masks pried off, some going as far to have their masks completely off with flushed cheeks and oozing a particular mix of smugness and confidence.

There's more than one Hero here only for the chance to catch the attention of the Number Two Hero and they're thankful for the ostentatious mask that hides their face and consequent grimace from view.

They'd rather be anywhere than here but it wasn't like they could say *no*.

"It's a bit much," they agree, tracking a Hero he knew had done more than one deal with the Syndicate, unknowing that the Villains were collecting and setting up the evidence to hang them out for the world to see.

He should have thought twice about appearing in one the underground fighting rings.

Eret had recognized him easily, a high-bidder for violence who enjoyed spinning the *wheel of misfortune*, hooting and hollering with the blood thirsty crowds for whatever punishment would be heaped on the fighters.

He'd thought himself *safe* but it was only a matter of time. Fundy had been dealing with it for the last few weeks to make sure the case was iron tight. He was too high up to allow anything but perfection.

There's no thing as security in the world of Heroes and Villains.

Some just needed to learn that lesson.

"All this for one former Hero?" Puffy's voice is thick with skepticism and Eret has to appreciate her no-nonsense approach to the whole thing.

There's a reason Puffy chose to stay far away from the Hero tower and Eret has to admit they hold some fondness for their fellow Hero.

They could count on one hand the number of Heroes they respected and the entire situation with Red Chaos and Dream had left that drastically lowered, unsure what to think, even if he'd been truthful with the former Hero who'd sought him out.

A tragic fate, Eret muses, head tilting as they glance briefly to the balcony where Red Chaos had stood, one leg up in a cast, eyes bright as he looked upon the fireworks going off in the sky just a year ago.

Young.

How young was another question entirely, but Eret didn't much like the implications they'd put together during the years of carefully watching Red Chaos shadow Dream with a loyalty that envious and desirable.

And ultimately, it seemed that Red Chaos might have been a fool for doing it, for all that he sought desperately to understand.

Eret wonders what it's like to trust someone so completely, so surely, that they'd be looking for reasons even faced with betrayal.

They can't imagine it.

Even with Niki there were things they couldn't share, words dying on their tongue, hidden behind the cage of their teeth, choosing to say nothing rather than lie.

Their sister is forgiving in that, understanding even when Eret struggles to understand how she can be.

Kindness had always been unfaltering with Niki and even branded with the label of Villain that hadn't changed.

They sometimes wonder if Niki sees something in the world that they just can't.

"We'll see, I suppose," Eret muses thoughtfully. "It appears that there might be more to the situation at hand."

"How so?" Puffy raises a brow.

"They would have a hard time selling all of this to the Hero commission if it just had to do with a stray Hero, even someone like Red Chaos." Eret reaches out, plucking a glass of bubbling champagne but making no move to drink it. "This reeks of a bigger operation at hand."

"The Syndicate." It's not a question.

"Perhaps," they allow.

"That's foolish," Puffy scoffs, voice lowering as she stepped closer with a dip of her brow, eyes cautious. "Everyone knows that removing the Syndicate would cause nothing but *chaos*. Say what you want about them but the Syndicate has an iron tight grip on the underground, working to eradicate trafficking rings and filtering money back to help support and offer education to the young."

Eret blinks behind their mask, surprised by the vehemence in her voice, but then- Puffy had always been invested in the health and prosperity of the children of L'Manberg, it was why she'd become a Hero, or so she claimed in the rare interview she partook in.

"If they're planning to take the Syndicate out they'll leave nothing but instability."

"They won't look at it that way." Eret lowers their voice to match Puffy's. "You and I both know that."

"Then they're more foolish than I ever dared to think!" Puffy straightens out. "Where is Dream? There's no way he'd allow this-" Puffy cuts herself off with a sharp inhalation.

Eret flicks their gaze up as the room floods with a sudden rippling silence as Schlatt steps into the room from the elevator, dressed to perfection, lava wrapping around his horns in an eerie glow even in the light from the dangling chandeliers, fancy dress shoes neatly looped and his tie red and sharp.

At his heels Dream steps out in his signature green hoodie, mask in place, hiding his expression completely with the familiar smile.

His steps are quiet, his body language impossible to read, and Eret knows that their eyes aren't the only one locked onto the Number One Hero who stands strangely small without the familiar shadow of Red Chaos behind him.

"Apparently he's not just allowing it," Eret says in a quiet undertone as Schlatt spreads his arms out in an inviting flourish as Dream tucks his hands into the pocket on his hoodie, head tipping.

"He's one of the people conducting the whole thing."

-

"Red Chaos needs to be brought in alive and questioned!"

"I say shoot him dead and be done with it, mercy isn't owed to traitors."

-

"Hello, Red Chaos."

Tommy takes a single, careful step back.

"Punz," he greets with a baring of teeth behind his mask.

Chapter End Notes

Sooo, month was a bit rough on me and I was away for a few days, and additionally this chapter was just being a right bother to wrestle right, but I have clawed myself back to you guys with one ominously lurking hoodie wearing mercenary.

Funny how that goes.

And!! A whole Tubbo POV that *absolutely murdered my brain cells trying to get right*. I love Tubbo but I prefer writing him through a second pair of eyes, pls. It was a whole struggle trying to set up just how I wanted but I'm kinda vibing with it.

Also Eret my beloved <3

I don't really have a lot to add to that I think? I hope you're all having a wonderful day/night wherever you are and that Hush Now could bring some good vibes your way :)

-

If you're interested there's a [Hush Now Discord](#) that tends to go *brrrr* with the theories in designated channels and also have a lot of fun chatter and chill people on top of scoops of chaos. We arrange movie nights, MCC watching and the occasional game in VC so you're very welcome to join in on it! There's a bit of everything happening tbh and I have some wonderful mods who help keep things running smoothly :) I also ping there and on my [corpse-art](#) tumblr around an hour in advance before posting if you're interested in that!

-

DUDES. We have a ton of Hush Now art and I'm just shfk pls. Its amazing. You're all amazing. Go and give them all so much love<3

[The Warden and Red Chaos by undefinedscream](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[I'm fine on my own by tododokiiii](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[Red Chaos design by ghostiereanimated](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[I'll miss you by mothercoyote](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[Nothing like getting lost in a good fanfic by owlwinter8](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[FANART MASTERPOST](#)

Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“If you were to fall off a cliff you’d hit every damn branch on the way down.”

Dream had been laughing when he told him those words, hand stretched down, an offering of help to haul him up and out from the sludgy remains of the Villain which clings to him, a wet squelch as their hands grasps tight, his mentor only wheezing louder even as he hauled Tommy up to his feet.

He’s unsteady, covered from head to toe, and it fucking *reeks*, a rank smell that climbs up his nose as he wipes the back of his sleeve fruitlessly over it, grimacing, his mask cracked and discarded, but it’s safe, for just a moment, the two of them the only ones conscious in the empty warehouse.

The adrenaline is slowly fading, the rush leaving him lightheaded, but he supposes it could also be because of the several minutes spend without air as he was busy choking.

The Villain is out cold, caught in a state that’s vaguely humanoid but not *quite*, face a strange mess of smushed glob slowly being pulled back together.

There’s a tear in Dream’s hoodie, but there’s no blood.

Tommy, in comparison, feels like he’s been dragging through a thick thorny mess and then dropped off a cliff into a pile of mud, his muscles aching, nose twitching from the sting of sludge in a tear over the bridge of his nose.

He’s probably swallowed some.

He doesn’t want to think about it.

“I guess being a Hero sometimes means you have to get down and dirty, huh?” His voice is dry, gravelly, and he coughs, spitting out a glob of brown, pretending not to see the way Dream slowly stretches out a foot to nudge at it.

“There’s getting down and dirty,” his mentor tastes the words out slowly, teasingly, *“and swallowing the whole pile of shit.”*

Tommy had reached out to swipe at him, Dream dancing easily out of the way, laughing as Tommy growled low at him, red wrapping up his arms and legs, an answering green zipping up Dream’s limbs with the flash of a grin beneath a white mask with the tip of his head in challenge.

He thinks about those words as he stares at the Mercenary who shouldn’t be there but somehow *is*.

“Punz.”

It's *wrong*. It's supposed to be *Sapnap*.

Sapnap with his messy black hair, ridiculous white bandana, a flame printed on the plain white shirt he insisted on wearing over the black undershirt that Dream had practically bullied him into even as Sapnap kept protesting about overheating.

“I suppose I shouldn't be too surprised you recognize me,” the man comments idly as he stretches out from his crouch, a smooth liquid motion, almost *feline*.

A predator through and through, written into every motion of his body, careful and controlled, an ease that makes the hair on Tommy's neck rise with a crawling feeling of ill-ease down his spine as his own boots crunches down on grit and dirt with a slide and careful angling to make turning smooth and easy.

Punz is a hunter and Tommy isn't too interested in being his prey.

“Didn't expect to see me here, did you?” Punz head tips, face bare, blond hair sticking out from the edge of his white hoodie with little ridiculous swooping curls. He'd look almost casual if it wasn't for the Eye of Ender that glows a low shimmering green with a narrowed pupil from the middle of his chest, golden chains stretching to curl around him and keep it in place.

“And yet here you are,” Tommy bites out, tense, adrenaline struggling against the dull disappointment that wires deep around his bones, something darker and fouler in its path. “Why is that?”

Fingers strays down, tapping against the Eye of Ender. “I could *feel you*.” Punz's tone is mild but the words sends a shiver down his spine, eyes locked on the eye that stares right back at him.

“Where-“ Tommy cuts himself off, swallowing, muscles ripples as he shifts carefully, eyes on the bare face of the hunter whose mouth is slowly curving in amusement.

“Is Valorant?” Punz finishes, voice an easy roll with a teasing lilt. “Not here.”

“I can see that,” Tommy mutters, eyes flicking behind the man before settling back on him. “What-“

“Did I do to him?” Punz cuts him off and Tommy clenches his jaw, eyes narrowing dangerously. “Nothing.” The Mercenary raises his hand to press it flat over his heart. “Scouts honour.”

“And I'm supposed to just take your word for it?” Tommy scoffs.

“What other choice do you have?” The man's grin slowly eases, settling into something flatter that looks far more natural on his face. “I suppose you can always call up Jester and ask.” Blue eyes, a deep shade that looks almost unnatural against the paleness of his skin.

“Chronos is an option too, but I suppose that’s a bit harder.” Teeth gleams. “He didn’t look too well on the picture caught of the two of you.”

Tommy doesn’t ask *how do you know*.

The words get swallowed down, sharp like raking claws down the delicate skin of his throat, because he’s smarter than that.

Dream had taught him better than that.

“The fuck are you on about?” Because asking *how* might as well confirm it outright and Tommy doesn’t know how sure Punz is about the information but he sure as fuck isn’t about to give him *shit*. “Seems like a fucking odd pair of people to ask,” he scoffs.

Because if there’s someone who’s sure to have been careful about any rumours about the three of them getting out it’s fucking *Jester*.

Tommy might not fucking *get it* but Chronos and Jester are both clever bastards, specializing in being ahead of the game, and Tommy has to trust that even if he doesn’t understand what’s going on in Sapnap’s life anymore.

Even if Punz is sure he can’t know that Red Chaos knows about it.

And Tommy is good at playing dumb.

“They didn’t tell you?” There’s nothing in Punz’s body language that betrays him and Tommy wants nothing more than to throw something at him, anything to interrupts the easy façade of false pleasantry. “Seems like you’re being left out of loop, Red.” Mockery, but not really, just truth, as much as it fucking *stings*.

“I don’t-“

“They’re dating,” Punz interrupts him and Tommy twitches, nose flaring beneath his mask. “Chronos, Valorant and Jester,” he clarifies, as if he *fucking needs to*. “Quite the odd trio, wouldn’t you say?”

“You think Valorant-“

“I don’t think, I *know*.” Punz rolls his shoulders, looking unconcerned by the growing tension in Tommy’s body. “Not that I care, it’s their business, and I’m certainly not getting paid to rat out the messy business of relationships amidst Heroes, Villains and Vigilantes.” A pause, head tipping. “There’s a surprising amount of them, if you know where to look, and they’re not nearly as discreet about it as they think they are.”

Punz eyes locks onto his and Tommy jerks before he can catch himself, heart pounding in his chest, adrenaline wiring through his limbs, breath sharp and rasping in his throat as his world narrows into those cool blue eyes-

“You shouldn’t be here, Red Chaos.”

“And yet I am.” The words are fumbled out, not nearly as strong as he wants them to be, sweat beading at his neck and fingers twitching before he forces them out, curling and uncurling them with a swallow. “So, what’cha gonna do about it?” he forces out, jaw aching from the tension climbing through him. “*Arrest me?*” he mocks.

“No,” Punz answers simply, eyes never veering away, and it’s making him fucking *claustrophobic*- “I leave such things to the Heroes.” A considerate beat. “Or the Enforcers, I suppose, they’ve been spreading out through the city, sticking their noses where they don’t belong.”

It feels like a warning but Tommy struggles to *think*, his thoughts heavy, as if drenched in fucking *sludge*, and Punz is still watching him and fucking-

Enforcers – Tommy latches onto the only thing that makes *sense* and-

Tommy doesn’t like thinking about them. Dream had point blank refused to work with them unless he had to and Tommy hadn’t seen much of them other when they were stepping onto scenes to help with crowd control of clean up- the most Dream would allow with a sense of heavy distaste.

“*They work for the Hero commission,*” Dream had muttered the first time Tommy had spotted one in person while his mentor was wrapping heavy handcuffs around the Villain they had apprehended. “*They just mindlessly obey. There’s no empathy in the work they do.*”

Shoulders back and hands clasped at their lower back the Enforcer had lowered their head in greeting, silent and giving them plenty of space. Dressed in the navy blue uniform with sharp red lines, brass buttons, and a golden mask that slots heavy and metallic over their mouths to settle over the bridge of their noses.

The brim of their hats are pulled low, always, shadowing their faces, and on their arms the Tree of L’Manberg stands out proudly on a patch of black that wraps thick around their biceps, their rankings worn proudly beneath it.

When Tommy was younger he’d found it beautiful- the trunk spiralling into spindly branches, strangely elegant where they spread out against the mocking image of rays in a half-sun against a backdrop of dark blue. The tree itself is white and where the trunk spirals down into roots the background trades out into red, the entire thing wrapped up in a round wall of yellow.

He isn’t too sure what he thinks about it these days.

“Yeah?” he bites out, brow furrowing as he wrestles against the ill-ease that’s fucking *eating his brain*. “What the fuck-“

“They’ve been spotted in the Pit.”

Tommy’s mouth click shuts.

He stares.

“What the fuck do you mean they’ve been spotted in the fucking *Pit*?” He’s thankful for his mask, suddenly, his voice raising in pitch because fucking *what*.

The Pit, the underground web beneath L’Manberg where a lot of Villains and Vigilantes operated, shady businesses and information traded for heavy coin, a place where those who couldn’t find their place overground escaped to, hiding away or even disappearing.

Tommy had heard plenty about the fighting rings where powers were pitted against powers, sometimes to death, the winners claiming riches and admiration *fast*.

Debts and collected favours sold to high-bidders, it was the central of the underground, rumours and whispers of the eerie red glow that pulsed and kept it alive.

It’s not really a *web*, exactly. That would imply that it was all connected and it’s not really, not as far as Tommy understands it. Rather it’s hollowed out depths beneath the city, protected by powers that had sealed them shut unless you knew how to find them.

The Pit was the central of it all, rumoured to lie beneath the Hero Tower itself, but there’d been no evidence of it, and Dream had merely shrugged when Tommy had asked him where he thought it was, having little to offer on the topic.

They’d both agreed that it was better left alone.

The most Tommy had seen of it was one of the fighting rings he’d tagged along with Dream to follow a rumour about the strange disappearances and reappearances of people, teenagers and children in particular, who’d lost their memories, turning up at odd locations. The leads had eventually fizzled out, ultimately leading to nothing, but Tommy would never forget the sheer and utter *brutality* of bones breaking and blood splattering under the cheer of the surrounding crowd.

All for the payment of gold. For *survival*.

He’d found himself wondering if that’s where he’d turned up if Dream hadn’t found him, powers burning through his veins, the taste of blood in his mouth, shouts and cries from the blurry mess of faces blending together around him.

It was a popular place for hybrids in particular, half-human features in the crowd Dream had led him through, hand wrapped tight around his wrist, hood pulled low despite the disguise, eyes flickering and trailing over hooves and paws, those shut out from the society above but finding a place, here, where there was no judgement.

The Pit was the place rumoured to be the home of Jester who’d appeared suddenly, feathers buttery yellow, cocky and irritatingly charming as he claimed the ground that would become Las Nevadas.

Whatever The Pit was, wherever it was located, it was supposed to be *safe* from Heroes and the fact that fucking *Enforcers* had found their way into it-

Tommy growls, shaking his head.

It promised nothing good, he gets that much, the Pit wasn't something one just *messed with*. There weren't nearly enough Heroes to handle a war against the underground, loathe as Tommy was to admit it, they were already scrambling as it fucking *was*.

There was a reason Dream had been run ragged by the Hero commission, more and more weight being put upon him as the Syndicate had been getting more and more active with the Blood God and Siren both joining the ranks beside the Angel of Death.

And the Syndicate was just a small portion of Villains active in L'Manberg. They were the fucking *powerhouse* of Villain organizations but Tommy had had more than his fair share of interactions with Villains like fucking *Manifold*, who had picked a personal vendetta against Red Chaos behind his back, or Antfrost and Velvet who habitually left destruction in their wake, streets bleeding red.

"It means what it means," Punz answers him, the fucking *asshole*. "It was taken care of, of course, but the fact that they got in- well, there's more than one person who has opinions on it."

"Why are you even telling me this?" Tommy demands aggressively, clenching his jaw, trying to understand the restless violence that bubbles and froths inside of him, clawing for his attention under the eerie blue gaze of the Mercenary and the Eye of Ender that rests on his chest. "Why are you *here*?"

"I'm here for you, why else?" The Mercenary shifts, one hand folding against his neck, grin a stark contrast against the blank look in his eyes that speaks of *nothing*. "I was paid a pretty sum of money for you, Red Chaos."

Tommy takes a jerky step back, leg nearly folding under the adrenaline that crashes violently through him, eyes dilating and he clenches his fists tight because *what the hell-*

"I'm curious though, I'll be real with you," Punz continues easily, still watching him with that eerie calm. "What is it that makes you such an interesting piece on this chessboard that both Dream and Schlatt would pay me to find you?"

"Dream-" Tommy nearly chokes on the word, skin itching and clawing, adrenaline leaving him shaky, breath too quick even as he draws a deep desperate one in an attempt to ease it because it's fucking *wrong* he's not- "Dream sent you?" he gasps out, drawing his arms tight over his chest, trying desperately to understand why his *body* is fucking-

"He didn't pay me enough."

Tommy barely registers the words, his world dilated to *blueblueblue* and then *green*, the Eye of Ender flaring bright, the glow climbing up the walls of the building beside them, his lips parting with a sharp drawn noise, but he's moving on instincts ground to his very being as he turns, his mind blaring *predator* with a desperate twist of his feet and-

He stumbles, shaky, fear climbing raw and primal through him as he collides against the wet metal of the dumpster, pushing up blindly, heart to loud, thoughts and logic drowning in panic he doesn't *understand* and-

He wants-

“You’re having quite the unusual reaction,” Punz comments somewhere behind him as Tommy gasps, breath whistling oddly behind the mask that feels tight and suffocating over his mouth. “Usually it’s only hybrids that have such a severe reaction to my powers but there’s nothing that hints about such a thing with you.”

A hand lands on his shoulder, pulling him sharply back, feet unable to catch him, and an arm loops around his back, pulling him tight against a firm chest to hold him up, the fabric of his hoodie different from Dream and *wrongwrongwrong* where it touches his skin and-

He wants Dream-

He wants-

“Oop- there we go,” Punz steadies him as Tommy’s forehead sinks against his clavicle, trembling, unable to do anything as fingers dip beneath his hood, stroking curiously over the side of his head on top of his beanie. “No ears, no horns-“ Punz hums, fingers slipping to trace over his ear, and Tommy jerks, skin burning. “Nothing strange about your ears either. They’re usually the easiest tell, not a sure thing though.”

There’s an almost clinical feel to the observation, Tommy’s brain thick with fuzzy fear that screams to *runrunrun* even as his legs refuses to obey, even as his face his grasped, turned, blue eyes suddenly far too close and swallowing up his vision.

“Nothing obvious on your face or about your eyes either...” Punz murmurs as Tommy struggles for air, throat closing tight, heart jackrabbiting inside his chest as his vision tunnels dark. “Oh, that might have been a bit too much for you, huh? You’re looking pretty out of it there, Red.” The Mercenary laughs and suddenly Tommy can *breathe*, air flooding his lungs with a hitched stutter. “There we go, just one deep breath after the oth-“

“*Fuck you,*” Tommy gasps, face still grasped, studied as he sucks air greedily down his lungs, lightheaded and shaking.

“A fair enough reaction,” Punz grins at him, adjusting his hold to lower Tommy down to the wet ground before releasing him and Tommy goes boneless against the press of bricks behind him.

The man remains crouched just in front of him as he shivers and trembles, *weak* in a way that makes him want to claw the mocking grin of the Mercenary in front of him, muscles jerking and spasming, fear still thick and heavy where it wraps cruelly around his heart and he struggles against the urge to curl up, to hide it away-

“You have to understand I couldn’t just let you slip out of my grasp. You’re quite the hard one to find in the first place.” Punz reaches out and Tommy jerks back, head colliding against the bricks behind him, unable to escape the trail of finger over the seam of his mask. “I don’t usually get myself involved in the business of my clients but when two of the top Heroes of L’Manberg request my service I can’t help but be *curious*.”

Two fingers dig down against the metal seam of his mask, against the soft skin of his cheek.

“I was paid a pretty sum of money for you, Red Chaos,” Punz repeats almost absently, a strange look in his eyes. “I was paid for my silence, for my loyalty, for my services by Dream and Schlatt both but Schlatt paid me *more*.” Punz’s blue gaze searches his, the adrenaline pounding with the beating of Tommy’s heart. “He wants you, desperately, delivered on a silver platter, trussed up like a pretty little price.”

The alley is dark, melting snow is soaking into his pants, and Tommy feels a tiny palm press against the clammy skin on his neck and all Tommy suddenly and quite desperately wants is *Wilbur*.

Wilbur with his wild curly hair, smile impossibly soft for him, for *Tommy*, and he never should have *fucking left*-

“Dream didn’t pay me enough,” Punz hums. “He wanted you out of the picture, you know? Was quite insistent about it too. Seemed quite *eager* to get you as far away from L’Manberg as possible, even if it meant locking you up for a few months.” Teeth, white and straight inside the man’s mouth. “And yet, right now all the Heroes are gathering together, the two top Heroes united to hunt you down and finally put an end to the reign of the Syndicate. A power game behind the curtains that’s going to decide the future of L’Manberg...” Punz’s fingers presses sharper, nails digging into his skin. “And here I have you, weak and shivering in my grasp, one of the deciding factors in this game.”

The man leans closer.

“Tell me,” Punz breathes. “Why *you*?”

“How the fuck would I know?” Tommy laughs shakily, curling on himself, drawing his limbs tight in a vain attempt to curb the trembling that wrecks insistently through him. “You saw it just as well as the rest of the world did- I was thrown out, discarded like yesterday’s trash, and you think I *know shit*?”

Punz’s blue eyes bores into his.

“So it’s not about what you know but who you are then?” the Mercenary tips his head. “You’re a fine price I suppose, powerful enough to go toe-to-toe Dream himself.” That’s a lie but Tommy isn’t about to tell him that.

Dream had always been faster, stronger, *smarter* – clever in a way that drew his admiration and desire to protect and see him rise and stand tall above the rest.

Tommy is just... *Tommy*.

He knows he’s *good* but it’s all because of Dream.

He’s *nothing* without him.

His jaw clenches tight behind his mask, muscles taut, and Punz’s gaze flickers, a wry sort of twist to his mouth that looks eerie with the blank eyes.

The Eye of Ender sits tauntingly in the middle of his chest.

“You don’t agree?” There’s a mild sort of curiosity in the man’s voice. “Your powers are alike enough that most would think you related but I wonder...” Blood beads on his cheek. “There are strange coincidences in the world but two top Heroes with powers so alike... I wonder, what hides behind this mask?” Pain stings his cheek, nails digging deeper, carving into his flesh. “What hides behind *Dream’s*?”

Nothing interesting, Tommy thinks, lips parted and breath heavy even as he narrows his eyes dangerously, glowering darkly at the man even as he trembles, because-

Dream’s just fucking *Dream*. Blond hair, darker than his own, a slight wave to it when his mentor let it grow out, hands dragging self-consciously through it with a lopsided grin when he’d ask Tommy to cut it shorter. His eyes- green, like the leaves of spring, bright and warm. His face is just- it’s just *Dream*. A scar splitting side-ways down it where the Blood God’s axe had torn through it but-

Dream is just Dream.

Tommy is the danger here, and he knows it, protectiveness flaring dark and heavy through him as he digs his nails into the coarse fabric of his pants where he sits.

“I’ll kill you,” Tommy promises hoarsely. “If you fucking remove my mask.”

The fingers still.

“I thought you didn’t kill.” Punz cranes his head lower, closer, voice lowering. “Wasn’t that your whole deal, *Hero*?”

Yes, Tommy thinks but-

Tommy lives to protect Dream, that’s his promise, and he can’t let anyone find out who he is, not when it could cost Dream *everything*-

Punz’s brow dips, lips parting-

Tommy slams his teeth down hard on his tongue, the pain bursting hard through his body, crashing through the adrenaline and he latches onto it as he lashes out, *too weak* as he feels the jerky motion of his knuckles colliding against flesh, whipping Punz’s face aside and-

Clarity returns like a bowstring and he sucks a shocked breath-

Punz’s eyes snaps towards him and Tommy’s world crashes down, air stolen, throat closing up, his vision tunnelling violently as his eyes flares wide, fingers grasping to wrap around his throat, clawing into his own skin as everything crashes overwhelming into him, burning all throughs outside *predatorpreypredatorpreyrurunrunrunneedtorun-*

“Shouldn’t have done that.” Punz grasps at his collar, hauling him up, but Tommy barely recognises it through the thrum of panic, a whine of pure and utter *fear* crawling unwillingly past his lips as he jerks, grasping blindly into the white fabric of the man, pupils dilated and-

It's *wrongwrongwrong*-

He can't fucking-

His hand gets caught, fingers extended like claws, inches from the blue gaze of the mercenary who looks down at him without mercy.

"Clever," Punz murmurs. "So, so very *clever*."

Tommy stares back at him, mute and barely breathing, pinned by the unnatural fear coursing through his veins.

"Most take a bit to put the pieces together." The fear pushes deeper, winding down his very bones and suffocating him as Punz releases his hand which falls limp as the mercenary pats the top of his head and Tommy stares blindly up at him. "Dream is a fool for throwing you away, Red. He needs all the support he can get at the moment."

His vision tunnels, barely feeling the rough burn of rope wrapped tight around his wrists, and he's cold, shivering, teeth clacking together as it's tugged harsh and too tight, a voice distant and muffled, talking and he struggles for logic, for *sense*, for something beyond the blind panic and-

-

"One down, another to go," a voice hums. "Don't worry Red, I'll find you some good company."

Tommy hits the ground with a gasped breath, wet and cold where he shivers, curling miserable on himself, and-

-

Tommy jerks to awareness, disorientated, pressed against something coarse and dark, distantly hearing the dull rumble of *something* and-

"Red!" the voice is small, relieved, too close, and Tommy draws a shuddering breath, staring blankly at the small green face in front of him, his thoughts thick and slow as his chest expands and lowers, the noise loud through the voice changer in his mask. "Red?" A small palm presses against his cheek, brown eyes peering anxiously at him. "You don't look very good."

It's dark, the floor beneath him rumbling, and it should mean something but-

"Hold on." Tommy's eyelids flutter close, struggles open, and- "Jester is on his way, okay? He promised."

Unconsciousness drags him under, the last thing he sees furrowed brow of a too small face, small hand gentle and wet where it presses against his cheek.

-

When Tommy was younger he'd dreamt of flying.

"It's pretty fucking cool, innit?" he'd said, curled up on the floor, back pressing against the couch where Dream was half-sprawled out with a leg on the rug beside him, frowning at his laptop. *"Being able to fly would be pretty handy as a Hero. It's too bad he's a Villain."*

On the screen is a picture, wings spread wide, the long thin blade the Angel of Death was famous for more red than silver where he stands in the blood that pools dark on the concrete, blue eyes gleaming eerily in the darkness, too bright to be fully human and focused with dangerous accuracy on the person who had taken the photo.

Distantly Tommy hears the reporter tally up the number of dead, the civilian who'd taken the photo among them, a young woman at the wrong place at the wrong time.

Tommy has never seen eyes like the Angel of Death's before and he doubts he ever will.

The feathers of his wings are pretty for all that they're deadly, so black there's a sheen of blue to them, and he can't help the admiration and envy alike that curls through him as he presses his chin down against his knees, arms drawing tighter around his legs to curb the urge to reach back and press against his bare back.

He's thirteen, just shy of turning fourteen, and it's only a matter of time before he'll stand before the Angel of Death himself.

"It's not a fun thing being a hybrid in this day and age," Dream answers distractedly and Tommy listens to the clacking of his keyboard as he writes. *"It's even worse to be a hybrid associated with a Villain."*

"It's not like you can help what kind of hybrid you are," Tommy mutters, frowning.

Avian hybrids were rare and Tommy doesn't know of anyone in the ranks of Heroes and Villains outside Jester and the Angel of Death.

"People are cruel." The clacking of keys pauses. *"Perhaps if you were an avian you could do some good out there, bring a bit of positivity to it."*

"But I'm not."

"But you're not," Dream agrees and Tommy hears the laptop close shut, feels it when Dream settles with a knee on each side of him. *"You're Tommy and that's quite enough."* Fingers tugs gently at a stray curl behind his ear. *"I know what you're thinking and you can't, Tommy. You know what happened last time."*

Tommy knows, feeling the too sharp edges of his teeth with the press of his tongue, barely visible in the mirror but still lingering, a physical reminder.

"It's unfair and cruel." He curls tighter, hand tight around his wrist, knuckles white. *"I think hybrids are fucking cool and yet- people are fucking shitty."*

"There's kindness as well. Honest and good people out there."

Tommy huffs but- he knows that Dream is right, for all that his resentment and hatred sometimes chokes thick in his throat, gnawing and coiling like a leader weight around his heart.

He doesn't dare tell Dream that sometimes- sometimes he just really fucking *hates* people.

-

Sapnap draws a breath, trying desperately to calm the beating of his heart, his powers licking hot beneath his skin as he presses his palm against the door and pushes it open.

Fundy jerks, craning around to look at him with a flick of his ears, tail curling around his leg, but Sapnap only has eyes for Karl.

Karl with his easy infectious laugh and bright grin but none of that now where he lies quiet and pale.

He swallows thickly. "How is he?" His boots feels heavy as he lets the door close shut behind him, and he reaches up, grasping at his headband and tugging it off, letting it flutter down to the ground. "Is he--"

"Better than we thought he'd be at this point," Fundy cuts him off, offering a lopsided smile, and Sapnap's shoulders droops, exhaustion catching up with him, melding with the stark relief as he steps forward, sinking heavily into the chair beside the bed. "He's dehydrated and too thin but it could be worse, man."

"I came as soon as I heard." Had left the bullshit meeting at the tower after returning from his mission, his phone broken and slammed with thr updates on the happenings in Las Nevadas, at the sightings of *Red Chaos* carrying *Chronos* away from it and-

Goddamn it, Tommy, he thinks tiredly, even as he reaches out, grasping Karl's limp hand, squeezing it gently as he lets his powers flare, just enough to let the temperature of the room slowly climb up from the slight chill still clinging to the corners of it.

Karl's hands are calloused, paint chipping on his nails, and Sapnap frowns as he drags a gentle thumb over them.

"Where is Quackity?" he asks, glancing at the Vigilante who offers a shrug.

"I don't know, he left in quite the hurry once he was sure you were on your way back. Seemed quite important, he got all frowny about it."

More important than Karl? Sapnap wonders and then winces, hating himself for even thinking it.

"I'm sure he'll be back before you know it." Fundy's nose twitches. "There's strange things happening, I'm not sure I like it." He huffs a breath, sliding off his chair with a twitch of his thick bushy tail. "You'll stay with him?"

"Yeah, of course." Sapnap tightens his hold. "You heading out?"

“I’m heading down to the Pit.” It’s more information than he’d expected and he frowns at the Vigilante. “Things are getting restless so I’m checking it out. Apparently there’s rumours of *Enforcers* finding their way there.” Fundy’s ears folds back. “Sounds ridiculous if you ask me but, well, I’d be a bad Vigilante if I didn’t at least check it out.”

“Right.” Sapnap sinks deeper into his chair.

“There’s a spare mattress in one of the rooms down the hall.” Fundy hooks his thumb out in the direction of it, claw black and sharp. “But it’s a pretty big bed so you can probably fit yourself into it if you want to, just mind the IV.”

“Got it.” He belatedly offers a tired smile. “Thank you, Fundy.”

“Eh, we Vigilantes gotta stick together, you know?” Fundy grins, teeth sharp. “Seeya around, Hero.”

Sapnap huffs but he’s too tired to care about the mocking little goodbye as he grasps and tugs his shirt tiredly over his head after the door closed shut, slowly peeling the rest of his gear off until he’s left in just his boxers.

He presses a knee down on the bed, gently moving Karl’s unmoving body up and settling him down on the side of the bed, double checking to make sure nothing was disturbed before letting himself crash face down beside his fiancé.

The bed feels cold and too empty without Quackity there but he paws blindly for Karl’s hand, pulling it close to his chest and squeezing it tight.

“I’ll be here when you wake up,” he promises, turning his head to look at the older man who sleeps, chest rising and falling slowly, bags dark beneath his eyes, and- “I’m glad you’re safe. That you came back to me.” The words feels strange in the silent room, without the answering soft coo from Karl or the teasing from Quackity to chase the mushy words. “I love you,” he says and he means it, from the depth of his very heart. “I don’t know what I would do without you.”

Only silence answers him and Sapnap closes his eyes, breathing out as he curls just enough to press his forehead against the other’s shoulder.

“Wake up soon, okay?” he mutters softly.

Chapter End Notes

AYY, I'm back :D

Apparently working 11 days in a row with two long flights just crashed me for a bit, what do ya know. But I've returned, I'm back, I have a chapter, it's-

I mean. Tommy is... he's vibin, really. Having a wonderful time. Our boi is just- you know. A bit kidnapped. Just a smidge. A teensy bit kidnapped.

...

:)

Sending all of you guys all my love, I hope you're having a good day or night, wherever you are<3

-

If you're interested there's a [Hush Now Discord](#) that tends to go *brrrr* with the theories in designated channels and also have a lot of fun chatter and chill people on top of scoops of chaos. We arrange movie nights, MCC watching and the occasional game in VC so you're very welcome to join in on it! There's a bit of everything happening tbh and I have some wonderful mods who help keep things running smoothly :)

You can find me on **tumblr** here: [corpse-art](#)
And I'm also on **twitter** now here: [corpsey_art](#)

I post a one hour countdown on all my social medias for a new chapter update if you're interested in such a thing :)

-

DUDES. We have a ton of Hush Now art and I'm just shfk pls. Its amazing. You're all amazing. Go and give them all so much love<3

[Tree of L'Manberg by qxtw_0](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[A soft morning with Dream and Tommy by Eelsdancingonpluto](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[La Jolla by mothercoyote](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[Mentor by mothercoyote](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[Red Chaos design by ApeyApe](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[Moments of Crimeboys by i-am-but-a-rusty-spoon](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[FANART MASTERPOST](#)

Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Ow, Tommy thinks with no real feeling attached to it, wincing as he cracks his eyes open, assaulted by the blaring light of a too small room, walls white and lamp dangling bright above him.

He'd half-expected to wake up in a dark basement, bars around him, or even the dark obsidian walls of Pandora, and he furrows his brow, breathing out as he twists his wrists, bound tight behind his back and-

His fingers are swollen, the rope too tight, and he huffs a tired breath, head fuzzy and a strange slowness to his thoughts as he slowly rolls himself over, hands digging uncomfortably into his back as he wiggles his fingers, out of sight and-

"Red!" Charlie's voice makes him jerk, head turning to the side before he catches himself, chest heaving a rough breath as he feels tiny feet inside his hoodie, hands slimy where they settle just below his ear. "I'm glad you're awake!" There's earnestness in the voice, an anxious undertone as the small body leans closer, a hush in his ear. "I don't know what he did," Charlie confesses as Tommy works on getting one thumb around the other. "But you were really, *really* bad and I didn't like it."

"I didn't much like it either," Tommy huffs quietly through his mask. "... What happened while I was out?"

Charlie perks up. "We went on a car ride! I don't think he realized I was there?" Fingers flattens against his skin, pressing to feel the beating of his heart. "He was touching your mask but he never removed it so your secret is safe!" Relief eases through him like a physical thing even as he braces himself carefully. "We were in a car," Charlie reports to him as Tommy jerks his thumb roughly aside, dislocating it with a brief clenching of his jaw and a breath. "And then we were here and he- he did something funny to the vents?"

"The vents?" Tommy asks as he wiggles his wrist to slide it out of the ropes, thumb aching as he finally slips free, flexing his fingers as he draws himself up, brow furrowing as he looks aside, spying the white metal low on the wall before flicking his gaze up, searching the corners of the walls but-

There are no physical cameras to be seen, nothing obvious that speaks of him being watched, and he peels the rope off his other wrist, letting it pool down on the floor, mouth drawing in a frown as he grasps his thumb and absently snaps it back in place with a well-practiced motion and brief sting of pain.

"This is a shitty kidnapping," he tells no-one in particular as he slips a hand into his hood, rubbing against the tension in his neck. "Fucking *hell* I never want to deal with his powers again though," he grumbles, discomfort still clinging thick to him.

Fear- unlike anything he'd ever experienced, instinctive and clawing up the very depth of his being.

The effects of it still lingers in the twitching of his fingers, in the way he can't help the way his eyes flicks towards the door, shoulders drawing tight at the thought of Punz returning-

Tommy has been afraid before- had clawed deep gorges in metal and stone, nails breaking and bleeding as the flames climbed hotter around him, a child whimpering against his chest, both of them covered in ash and soot, pinned in place where the roof had collapsed upon them.

It had been sudden and he'd barely been able to twist, wrapping around the child as he hit the ground with his knees, hunching over them.

It had been hot, it had been terrifying, unable to access his powers in the small space where the air had gotten harder and harder to breath in, the smoke curling thick in his throat, his mask pressed over the mouth of the child who shudders and whimpers, sobbing quietly, Tommy unable to do anything but mutter reassurances he hardly believed himself as he strained his hearing for any sound of his mentor.

When Dream had found him he'd been so out of it he'd barely done more than allow a hitch in his breath as thick slabs of stones were peeled off his legs, a mask of oxygen finally pressing over his mouth where he'd laid in Dream's arms, half-curved towards his mentor who shields his face with a tug of his hood and a careful palm against his face as he's carried to safety.

But Punz's power had hit something primal, beyond sanity and sensibility, and he draws a careful breath, feeling his lungs expand, breathes out.

"I told Jester," Charlie admits in the silence and Tommy jerks, fingers clenching tight in his pants to curb the instinctive urge to reach back and grasp tight to the slime. "I promised- but you were *hurt* and you didn't answer and I thought- I thought that he was going to hurt you." It's a miserable confession.

"Why would he even come?" Tommy asks doubtfully, throat aching, and he realizes a bit absently that he's thirsty as *fuck* as he carefully presses up from the floor.

Charlie is silent for a long moment, watching as Tommy kneels down in front of the vent, fingers running to the corners, jaw clenching as he feels the loosened screws.

And-

If the whole situation wasn't giving him warning signs before there's absolutely something fucking *off* about the entire thing.

Punz was *the* Mercenary of the Pit, he wouldn't be making stupid mistakes, would have no reason to offer him such an easy way out-

And yet the evidence stares back at him, as if daring him to try, an invitation and challenge alike as he drags his thumb over the top screw, feeling the way it easily twists further out of its secure hold of the wall.

“Schlatt is here,” Charlie says very quietly and Tommy stills, feeling the small body press closer with a small shiver. “Jester- Jester he *hates* Schlatt so I knew he’d come when Punz- he said he was taking you to him and he was here and I was- I was so *scared*.”

Something rotten and guilty crawls down his throat, wrapping around his heart, and Tommy breathes out before he carefully reaches into his hood, wrapping two fingers around the small figure and gently drawing him out as he sunk down against the wall, framing his palms to gently catch Charlie in the fold of them.

The slime looks miserable, shoulders drawn, sinking deep into the small hoodie Tommy had made for him, stained in places where the slime had bled into it, blotching the fabric, eyes lowered as he wrenched his small hands together, eyes lowered behind the frames of his glasses.

“Jester saved me, gave me a home, a place to call *mine*,” Slimecicle confesses quietly, hands stilling. “He’s kind.” There’s a helpless sort of faith and belief in the curling of the slime’s lips. “He wouldn’t- he *wants to help* but there’s a lot and- I can’t say, I promised I promised I promised but I-“ Slimecicle shivers, curling tighter on himself. “Jester says that- says that Schlatt is *bad* and you’re kind, you’re *good*, I don’t- I don’t want him to hurt you like he hurt Jester.”

Brown eyes looks up into his, earnest, desperate and-

Tommy stares at the small creature, glob sliding and dripping down its face, torn between the instinctive anger that claws up his throat because he’d *promised* but-

He’s so fucking *tired* of being on his own, to only have himself, his heart aching for Dream and for Wilbur, for soft brown eyes and the glimmer of pride in green.

He drops his head, bringing the slime closer, and tiny palms raises up, pressing against his forehead as Tommy let’s out a shuddering breath.

“I suppose,” he says weakly, “I’d rather deal with Jester than Schlatt.”

Because Schlatt- Schlatt is a fucking *asshole* but Jester, he’s Sapnap’s fiancé, and he can still taste the smokey whiskey that had been offered to him across the table inside the rustling walls of Las Nevadas outside who’s doors where Jester had stood against Schlatt, wings small on his back, refusing the Hero access in his hunt for Red Chaos.

Tommy is many things but irrationally foolish isn’t one of them- at least, he doesn’t think he is.

He knows that Jester had protected him, it’s part of why he denies the favour, other than his own dislike and discomfort.

“You’re not angry?” Slimecicle asks hopefully.

“Oh no, I am so fucking angry,” Tommy snorts. “You made a pinky promise and then you broke it.” He breathes out. “But- I’m grateful I suppose.”

Tommy has broken promises before, to protect Dream, he fucking *gets it*.

“Oh.” Charlie blinks at him as he draws back, peering down at the small slime. “Good angry?”

“I guess you could put it that way.” Tommy flicks his gaze towards the still closed door. “Did Punz mention anything about *when* Schlatt would get here?”

“He said three hours around-” A pause, brow dipping. “Two hours and thirty-two minutes ago.” Charlie nods proudly and- *yeah*, Tommy can put one and one together to make two.

Punz had known that Charlie was there but had done nothing about it, had even given him a time frame to report back which was suspicious as *fuck*. What reason did the Mercenary have? What was he thinking? *Why*-

Tommy draws a breath before he slips Charlie back up into his hoodie and the slime scrambles willingly back into the darkness as Tommy reaches for two of the screws, fingers moving quickly to loosen them up.

There wasn’t much point of worrying about the *why*.

Tommy wasn’t about to linger around and wait for fucking *Schlatt* to come find him anyway.

He’d sooner take his chances with the vent and whatever the hell Punz was planning.

-

The thing is-

Tommy knows that Dream knows where he lives so *why the hell hadn’t he just contacted him?* Or sent fucking *anyone other than Punz?* What was the reason? Surely Dream had had some sort of contact with Sapnap? Fucking *George?*

The only thing Tommy can think is that, for some reason Dream hadn’t been able to, and it makes him wonder if his mentor was being watched, fucking blackmailed or-

He doesn’t know.

There’s more to the situation than Tommy knows that to do with and he twists inside the vent, using his bare feet to push away because *Punz had taken his fucking shoes the bastard*. And socks. Like a goddamn *heathen* and-

His escrima are missing, his toolbelt removed, and Tommy grits his teeth as he curls around a tight corner, squirming his shoulders and pushing with his toes to get through the tight fit, breathing out with a huff of relief, sweat beading on his neck because-

Tommy had never enjoyed tight spaces, it had only gotten worse during the years, but he pushes back the ill-ease, thankful for his mask that filters the dust around him as he drags himself forward.

The one thing that is clear is that Dream needs him.

And Tommy will be *damned* if he fails him again.

-

“-how did it go?” Tommy halts, breathing hard in the darkness of the vent, his brow wet with sweat as he slowly turns his head to the left, peering down the tight space to the ventilation shaft at the very end of it where light is barely visible.

“As expected.” Schlatt’s voice flares something dark inside of him, livid and sharp with teeth. “The Heroes that didn’t turn up are all being noted, their names written down. It isn’t too long before the yearly ranking is released- I’m sure we’ll be seeing some shifts.”

Tommy is turning before he can think twice about it, moving closer, hyperaware of the drag of his clothes as he carefully inches his way forward, using his hands in front of him to drag himself forward, pushing with a curling of his toes as Charlie sinks deeper into the protective darkness of his hood.

“Some would call that misuse of power.” Punz’s voice is impossible to read and when Tommy carefully peers through the gridded metal of the opening it’s to see the Mercenary with his hands clasped behind his back, shoulders loose and relaxed.

Schlatt is dragging a hand through his hair, sprawled on a fine leathery couch with a glass of deep red wine, the bottom framed in an elegant cradle of his fingers, tie loosened and satisfaction oozing off him.

Music plays softly in the background, something classical, and Schlatt swirls the ruby liquid before raising it up, head tipping back as he takes a generous mouthful, tongue darting out to catch a drop at the corner of his mouth with a sharp grin.

“Some would say that,” he agrees mildly and Tommy presses closer, eyes locked on the man who sits *right there*.

If he had his powers-

“And Red Chaos? He’s all secured?”

“He is,” Punz agrees and nothing gives away the lie, Tommy’s heart thrumming in his chest. “Why did you want him anyway?” Punz tilts his head. “He’s loyal to Dream, isn’t he? It’s not like he’s going to be any help to you.”

“That’s exactly why.” Schlatt throws one fancy shoe up on the table, and then the other, stretching out with liquid satisfaction. “With Red Chaos out of the way Dream has no one to turn to, he’s all mine.” His mouth curls with teeth and Tommy rankles at the very *idea*-

“Dream doesn’t get attached but anyone with eyes can see that Red Chaos is his weakness, as much as he pretends otherwise. He *cares*.”

“So you’re planning to use him as blackmail,” Punz observes and Tommy lowers his head, meeting the blue eyes that flicks momentarily to him in warning before the Mercenary focused back on Schlatt.

“The money has been wired to you, of course,” Schlatt says without acknowledgement and Tommy digs his nails deep into the palms of his hands. “You’re quite the expensive one.”

“And I get results,” Punz hums, turning his wrist to press his thumb against the small screen of his watch, studying it briefly before looking up. “Siren will be harder to find, of course-“

“But you can do it,” Schlatt interrupts, raising his head to look at the Mercenary, the indentions that curls up his horns momentarily flaring hot, a warning.

And-

Siren, Tommy thinks, mouth curling bitterly, *of course it comes back to that fucker-*

“Of course,” Punz agrees easily. “Mob hybrids will always be trickier, of course. My powers tend to be a bit... unpredictable with them.” He shifts the weight of his feet. “I’ve admittedly never tried them out on a Phantom hybrid before.”

Schlatt scoffs. “I don’t care how you do it, all I care about are the results.”

Punz is silent for a long moment, studying the Number Two Hero who tips his head back to swallow more wine, throat bobbing until it was empty, and when the glass lowers down Punz slips closer, grasping for the bottle on the table under the dark gaze of the ram hybrid who watches him carefully.

“Red Chaos didn’t appear to know much when I confronted him.” Punz steps around the table, leaning down to pour as Schlatt offers him the empty glass, eyes never veering away.

“I’m not surprised.” Schlatt waves the Mercenary back and Punz twists the bottle in his grip, raising it to draw a mouthful before tipping it back onto the table, and Tommy watches the way Schlatt’s shoulders eases before the Hero raised his own glass, swallowing the wine hungrily. “He’s always been a mutt, eager to obey Dream’s every order without question,” Schlatt says with bitterness that makes Tommy’s mouth curl sharp. “Dream wouldn’t tell him more than what’s necessary.”

Because Dream is worth ten of you, he thinks spitefully, glowering darkly at the man with his stupid goatee and curling horns. *Someone like you will never have my loyalty.*

“Doesn’t matter anymore anyway.” Smugness and cruelty in the gleam of his dark eyes. “I’ve got Dream at my heel, Red Chaos bound and locked away, and soon Siren will kneel before me.”

“And what about the Blood God and the Angel of Death?” Punz asks with mild curiosity. “I can’t see them being too happy about it.”

“They won’t be a problem for too long,” Schlatt says with a dismissive wave of his hand and Tommy feels a shiver of ill-ease crawl down his spine because *what*- “The Syndicate has been allowed to reign for too long, like *pests* dirtying up the streets of L’Manberg. Dream has been far too lenient on them for far too long but I won’t be.” The glass is placed down sharply on the table, Schlatt leaning forward to look at Punz who doesn’t move. “You should join me, properly. I’ll pay you well.”

“A tempting offer,” Punz acknowledges, dipping his head. “But I prefer to stay out of things.”

Schlatt huffs an amused breath. “Ever the Mercenary, your loyalty owed to no one, playing both sides. The people from the Pit are all the same.”

“Perhaps,” Punz says and Tommy’s neck prickles, head lowering because he doesn’t fucking *get it*. “I think it’s about time for me to leave.” Punz takes a step back, turning-

“Not so fast.” Schlatt stands, tall, adjusting his tie and slicking his hair back as Tommy sinks back into the darkness of the vent, watching the almost imperceptible tension that settles in Punz’s shoulders. “Take me to Red Chaos first.” And- yeah, that grin on Schlatt’s face promises nothing good. “I want to see the bastard with my own two eyes.”

“As you wish,” Punz says and Tommy watches them, still, hardly daring to breathe as Schlatt followed the Mercenary on sharp even steps.

-

“Red?”

“We need to get the fuck out of here.” Tommy swallows thickly as he turns, jerking himself forward with a hard press of his shoulders inside the tight space, chest heaving. “Right fucking now-“

-

The thing is that-

The vents are tight, and even if Tommy is a lanky thing he’s still struggling, palms flattening to drag himself forward, squirming with impatience and hurry, breath sharp inside his mask because Schlatt is many things but he isn’t an *idiot*.

“I know you’re in there!” Schlatt’s voice is an echo, casting around him as he twists awkwardly around a corner, hands splaying out to brace himself as he goes down, the darkness daunting below him, and *fuck* if he gets stuck now- “Don’t be a fool, Red Chaos! Come out and face me like a man!”

Shut up, Tommy thinks with anger and frustration alike, palms sliding slick against the walls before he tenses his muscles, trembling as he gasps for one breath after the other, sweat dripping from his brow to fall down, down, down-

“You can’t hide from me!” Schlatt’s voice bounces, echoes, makes it impossible to tell where exactly it’s coming from and Tommy squeezes his eyes shut, turning to wipe his brow roughly against his shoulder with a shudder before letting himself slide further down, too fast, the path jerky-

“Red?” Slimecicle whispers, voice small. “Is he going to find us?”

“Probably,” Tommy hisses with strain he doesn’t want to acknowledge. “You said Jester is on his way, right?”

“Big me said he was,” Charlie says nervously, clinging tight and-

The darkness of the vents lightens up and Tommy doesn’t think, hands and feet sliding down hard, heat licking at his back as he tensed up, twisting into the first possible turn, pushing against the wall with his feet to get inside and-

His teeth slams down on the inside of his cheek to muffle his cry, jerking his foot out of the path of lava that had dripped down on it, skin sizzling, burning, the scent of cooking flesh filling the air as he clawed into the metal, back bending as he curled on himself as best as he could inside the tight space and-

There’s a noise, wet against the warmth, and Tommy trembles, white hot pain crawling up his spine, as he slowly turned his head around to look at the heel of his foot only to see *green-*

“Go!” Slimecicle urges, plastering himself over the wound with a wrap of stubborn arms as Tommy draws one sharp breath after the other, eyes too wide as more and more lava dripped down where he’d been, the intention so very painfully clear- “Red, Red- we have to go!”

Tommy twists around and pushes deeper into the vents, feeling blood drip warm down the sole of his foot as he forced it to move and-

A hiss forces itself through his teeth, hands hooking around the bend of the corner to forcefully drag him forward with a bend of his back and-

He feels like a fucking mouse in a trap, pressing and squirming desperately forward as Schlatt’s laughter echoes around him.

“Come out, come out, wherever you are,” Schlatt mocks, like a whisper, a chase, the air too warm. “Wouldn’t want you to boil alive in there now, Red?”

Fuck you, Tommy thinks, a tremble running down his spine, sweat drenching his brow.

“We need to get out-“ He pants as he slides down around a bend. “I can’t fucking *breathe-*“

Slimecicle makes a low anxious noise from behind him and Tommy hisses, jaw locked tight as he draws one sharp breath after the other, eyes stinging from the heat rising around him, the metal stinging against his bare feet and hands and-

Schlatt has to be close he realizes but he can’t afford to stay inside the walls and he twists feet first into a the next ventilation shaft after spying the metal grid at the very end of it,

awkwardly pushing himself backwards down it and-

His bare feet hits the grate and he swallows.

“Charlie- you need to get off me,” he grits out as he twists down on his back and curls his shoulders to wedge himself in place, braced with his palms pressed flat against the ceiling of the vent.

“But-“

“*Off*,” Tommy growls and there’s a squeak, small feet hitting metal as the slime detached from the heel of his foot, and Tommy draws both legs back, sucks a breath and then slams them forward.

Pain explodes across his senses but Tommy ignores it, repeating it, metal rattling hard, something splattering wet against the metal as he puts more and more force into it, desperation eating at him as he feels his shoulders grow warm, sweat making his skin slick, the metal of his mask heating against his skin and-

He hears something sizzle above him, wet and bubbling as metal folded and-

The right corner of the metal grate detaches and Tommy slams his feet down one last time before pushing hard, sliding and hooking his knees over the vent opening, heels digging into the wall as he dragged himself out with a twist seconds before the ceiling above him folded down in a bubbling wall of lava, bending and melting the metal in its path as he collides hard with the floor, panting open mouthed behind his mask.

He scrambles to his feet, stumbles as the pain of his foot makes itself reminder and cursing as he caught himself on a dresser and-

He pauses, one arm drawing across his chest, sucking one breath after the other as he slowly looked around the room, a shiver, cold against the heat where it crawls up his spine, his mouth and throat dry, something numb and horrified crawling through his veins.

He takes a slow step into the room, his left foot bloody in the print it leaves on the carpeted floor where it touches down, his gaze dragging over the childish cover on the bed, bees fluttering happily, books left to collect dust, a drawing block opened and abandoned with a harsh and rough scrawl of black blotting out the colours and shapes beneath it.

There’s homework cluttering up the desk, distantly familiar things as his fingers ghost over them, brow furrowing as he studies the complicated equations before reaching and yanking the first drawer open and-

More drawings, all of them blotted out, creased, some of them just smudged remains of an eraser going aggressively over the surface, and his neck itches uncomfortable as his thumb drags over them, seeing the wet splotches on the top.

He takes a slow step back, papers sliding from his hand.

The room feels like a tomb, perfectly preserved beneath a layer of dust, the glass of a broken bottle in the corner, the white carpet stained beneath a dent in the wall, and his heart thrums loud inside his chest as he draws a breath through his mouth.

Lets it out.

It's a child's room.

The realization settles heavy, his shoulders drawing tight where he stands, red bleeding into the carpet, warm and wet on his heel, beneath it, the pain a dull distant thing hidden behind adrenaline that's still pounding with the wet thumping of his heart as he looks towards the windows.

It's dark, it's always dark early in winter, but he recognizes the view easily enough, can piece things together-

He's in Schlatt's apartment building, all floors owned by the Number Two Hero, an elegant thing of black in direct contrast to the spiraling white Hero Tower, the outside so blank it reflected back the city around it, the glasses plain to see out from but not to see in from.

He furrows his brow, eyes flicking from floor to ceiling, to the dresser, studying the carpet as he carefully shifted his feet, gaze settling momentarily on the door that looms, quiet now, he can't hear Schlatt but that doesn't mean *shit*.

He should leave but-

"Red?"

"I need- we need to look for evidence." Tommy licks his lips as he fumbles a hand into his hoodie, grasping and pulling out the slime who goes willingly, eyes wide behind the frames of his glasses, his hoodie scorched black at the front, one red heart missing.. "It's like that adventure I promised, right?" he says in a hush. "We just- we need to be quiet and we need to work fast."

Slimecicle's eyes widens and then brightens for the first time. "I get to be a detective?"

"Yes! Yes- just, yeah." Tommy kneels down. "See if you can find anything in the rug, a- I don't know, they might have cut a hole somewhere, hidden something. We need- anything that could tell of who stayed here. A name- a letter, something, *anything*."

Slimecicle nods seriously, already craning around to look around the furniture that towers up around him as he slides a bit clumsily off Tommy's hand, leaving green sticky slime behind that Tommy wipes away on his jeans with barely a grimace.

He watches the slime trot over the rugged floor before hesitantly glancing at his heel, grimacing as he gently hooked two fingers beneath the hem of his pants and tugged them up.

The underside of his foot had taken the brunt of the heat, the thick sole of his heel burnt raw, skin curling up the back of his foot to leave a gory mess with black gritty rock and wool from

Charlie's sweater clinging to it, bone visible in the dark red liquid that shines in the light from the window, pulsing and bleeding wetly.

He sinks down on his rear with a dizzy breath, sucking air down his lungs forcefully, arm rubbing tiredly over his brow where sweat still clung wet to his skin.

"Fuck," he breathes out, something hysterical bubbling in his chest where he sits on the floor of a child's room that doesn't belong in Schlatt's tower.

A roll of bandage rolls across the rug, his gaze flicking up to find Slimecicle offering an unsure smile.

"I found it over there." He points to beneath the bed and Tommy squints at the half-open box, lid hanging slanted where Slimecicle had pushed it off.

Bandages did not belong inside the room of a child. At least not hidden away in a dark box beneath the bed inside an dusty old box.

"Of course you did," he huffs, grabbing for it. "Thank you," he tacks on belatedly.

Slimecicle perks up and offers him a grin before disappearing back into the dark beneath the bed and Tommy focuses on his heel.

There isn't much he can do about it like this other than wrap it up and hope for the best. The lava had melted into his skin and it's only sheer luck and Charlie's quick reaction that saves him from having it eat clean through his foot.

He's seen the devastation Schlatt can wreck, had experienced it himself with that fucking whip of his that allowed him to channel his powers through it, but it's an uneasy reality that he doesn't stand a chance against Schlatt like this.

His hands leave bloody prints on the bandage where the heat of the metal had burnt the tips of his fingers and palms but Tommy barely spares them more than a brief look, closing his eyes with a hiss as he wrapped the bandage tight over his heel and the back of it, trembling as his teeth sunk into the inside of his cheek, noise swallowed as he forced himself to draw it tight, knotting it with clumsy fingers on the top.

"Let me-" His voice breaks and he clears it, blinking at the sheen of wetness on his eyes, clears his throat as he scrubs the rough fabric of his sleeve over it. "Let me know if you see any shoes," he forces out as he pushes off the floor, balancing on the balls of his feet as he limps over to the bedside drawer and yanks the top one open, staring blankly at the mutilated ram plush inside of it before slowly sliding it back shut.

Right.

He glances uneasily towards the door, the silence crawling an uneasy feeling over him, the metal still warped and twisted inside the vent he'd barely escaped from.

It was likely that Schlatt had had him taken to one of the upper floors, stuffed away, and his escape through the vents had led him down to the man's personal floors where he wasn't

expected but it was only a matter of time, especially if Punz was-

He grimaces, yanking another drawer out, crouching down to search through the content, impatient as he pushes pens and scrunched up drawings aside, fingers gliding over the sides and roof to check for anything hidden-

“I found shoes!” Slimecicle’s voice is muffled, triumphant, a squeak following, and Tommy jerks his head up just in time to see the green slime face plant into the floor from where he’d toppled off a shelf inside the large built-in dresser with mirror doors.

He checks the last drawer before slamming it shut, limping over to Slimecicle who is carefully peeling himself off the floor, a pout on his lips.

Tommy leans over to where he’d been, grabbing the boots he finds at the back, half-hidden beneath the tails of jackets and expensive stiff suits that makes his mouth curl down.

They’re clearly too fucking small but Tommy has worked with worse, folding down and tugging hard to loosen the string before hunching on himself, making sure his face was hidden as he carefully pried his mask off and angled the boot up to his mouth.

His teeth sink into the leather, too sharp and not-quite-human as they tear through the front of it, mouth curling at the bitter taste, and he rather *not* think about where they’d been as he works, making quick work of it and spitting the bit out to the side.

He leans back, grabbing for the socks he’d seen, and carefully slips it on before working his foot into his, hissing at the sting of his heel as it settled into place, throbbing dully as he squeezed his eyes shut with a shuddering breath.

He yanks the threading hard, toes sticking out a bit awkwardly at the front, but it’s better than *nothing*.

He does the same with the other shoe, sliding his mask in place with a breath of relief before glancing across the room at the door, ears prickling and-

“I found something!” Charlie exclaims, too *loud*, small arms struggling to hold up the edge of the carpet, and Tommy *doesn’t think*.

He dives for the slime, yanking the carpet up the last bit, nails prying down into wood and clawing it up grasping blindly into the depth, fingers closing around paper he wastes no time stuffing into his pocket as he hears the sharp steps of familiar expensive shoes.

He grabs and shoves Slimecicle into his hood, hauling himself over the bed and grabbing for the lamp on the desk and the window shatters with a hard slam of metal against the corner of it, a fail safe built into nearly all kinds of glass, shards raining down on the street below to a startled scream from a passerby beneath it as the door slams open.

He pauses, one foot up on the window ledge, head turning to meet dark furious eyes with the glowering gleam of his own, mouth curling behind his mask even as the whip uncoils in the Hero’s hand, knuckles white around the handle.

“I’d stay around and chat,” Tommy bites out as Slimecicle burrows deeper into his hood. “But you know how it is- people to see, work to do, a Hero’s job never stops.”

“You forget yourself, Red Chaos.” The fury smolders wicked, smile too sharp on the ram hybrid’s face. “You’re not a Hero anymore.” He steps closer, Tommy’s fingers curling tight as Schlatt draws to his full height, the light from the window stretching his shadow behind him. “Dream threw you out and yet you cling to the leash and collar you wore for him as if it’s the only way you know how to live.”

“You’ve always been a right bastard,” Tommy growls, ignoring the way the slime tugs at his collar as he bares his teeth behind his mask, wind whipping cold around him. “What the hell are you up to, Schlatt? What the *fuck* do you want with Siren and Dream?”

“Curious?” Schlatt tilts his head, the curl of his lips mocking. “You’re not safe out there, Red. I was doing you a *favour*, bringing you here, and you’re a fool if you leave now.” Another step. “Your name is on everyone’s lips and you’ll be hunted down like the mutt you are.” A hand stretches out towards him, palm up. “If you stay here, you’ll be safe, at my side, where you were *meant* to be.”

“Yeah, I think not,” Tommy scoffs as lava licking red hot up the horns of the Number Two Hero. “I’d rather *die* than follow someone like *you*.”

“A pity.” Schlatt lowers his hand. “But I suppose that can be arranged.”

Tommy’s eyes flares as the whip uncoils, dark and rolling up with a wrap of livid hot lava, but he’s already moving, stepping out into thin air and twisting, hands catching on the edge to lurch himself down, fingers slick before he drops down to collide hard with the looping curl of the horns that broadened out tall over the entrance to the tower.

He wheezes, breath stolen, the ugly *crack* of bones breaking ringing in his ears even as he claws himself up, shivering and gasping for breath with trembling limbs, arm drawing painfully across his chest as he squints up above him where Schlatt looms out, looking down on him.

“I heard the Warden is hunting for you!” Schlatt’s voice rings through the night as Tommy peers down, grimacing at the drop as he carefully inched his feet over the edge. “You’ll be dead before the end of the week!”

Yeah well, we’ll just have to see about that, Tommy thinks, gritting his teeth as he lets himself fall.

Chapter End Notes

Look at our boi go. We're not even at the big kidnapping yet, this was just a little hiccup in our journey, it's *fine*.
~~for now~~

:)

Anyway, welcome back to a new chapter of Hush Now! Where our ceiling vent hero makes a scramble and stumbles upon some curious things before making a less than elegant escape out a window. At least he's still kinda in one piece, you know?

Hope you guys are having a wonderful evening/morning/night whatever it happens to be! I'm gonna go roll out my back because it be pain. Much love<3

-

If you're interested there's a [Hush Now Discord](#) that tends to go *brrrrr* with the theories in designated channels and also have a lot of fun chatter and chill people on top of scoops of chaos. We arrange movie nights, MCC watching and the occasional game in VC so you're very welcome to join in on it! There's a bit of everything happening tbh and I have some wonderful mods who help keep things running smoothly :)

You can find me on **tumblr** here: [corpse-art](#)
And I'm also on **twitter** now here: [corpsey_art](#)

I post a one hour countdown on all my social medias for a new chapter update if you're interested in such a thing :)

-

DUDES. We have a ton of Hush Now art and I'm just shfk pls. Its amazing. You're all amazing. Go and give them all so much love<3

[Alleyway Cats by eelsonpluto-art](#) NEW FOR THIS CHAPTER

[FANART MASTERPOST](#)

Chapter 25

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy's foot hits the ground hard, propelling him forward with a wet slide in the slush and pain that wires white hot up his spine, shoulders bunched tight even as he forces himself one step after the other, his heart loud in his chest as he swerves past busy shoppers, surprised and shocked faces barely registering as he slides, pushing forward with a scream that rings out behind him.

Hero or Villain- the headlines blare inside his mind, the reality of what he's become in the eyes of the people he's sworn to protect settling like a physical weight inside his chest as he vaults over a baby carrier being pushed out of a store with the parent's smile dying, words cut off and phone dropped, hitting the ground as he touches down on the other side of it with a jolt of pain that makes him stumble before catching his footing.

Shouts and fingers pointed as the commotion draws the attention of those in front of him, turning as he barrels past them, lips parting and-

“ENFORCERS-“

"Red Chaos-!"

“Someone call-“

A scream ringing out behind him. His steps faltering for just a moment, a beat of his heart, the arch of his foot pressing down to propel him forward with new desperation, knowing he needed to *get the fuck out of there* before Heroes could be drawn to the scene because he doesn't stand a fucking chance like this.

The knowledge burns rotten and ugly inside of him with every pained breath, lungs expanding against broken ribs, desperate and short.

“We need Heroes-“

“Where is Dream-!”

He shoulders roughly into a man who steps into his path, twisting and slamming the heel of his foot into the back of his knee with enough force to send him down on the ground and prevent the reaching hands from getting hold of his hoodie, a wince and sharp sucked breath choked in his throat as he staggers and-

He locks eyes with a frightened child clutching the pantlegs of his mother for just a moment before pushing forward, weaving through the people tugging and pushing out of his path.

Red Chaos had never meant to be *this*. The reality of it burns, far too real outside headlines, talk shows and late-night news on his television, reflected here in the eyes of the people he's

sacrificed *everything* for.

It wires thick in his chest as he comes to a halt as he catches sight of an Enforcer already turning towards him, clad in the navy blue gear with the sharp red stripe down the front of the brass button-up of the long coat, ignoring the shout, stumbling and ducking into the shopping center with its bright light and crowded shoppers, letting it get eaten up by the startled screams as he trades concrete for stone flooring with the slow moving revolving door he falters inside.

The civilians briefly trapped with him stares wide-eyed as he draws one sharp breath after the other, unable to stop the trembling of his limbs, tasting iron before he swallows it down, sweat sliding down the side of his face.

He presses his palm against his ribs, grimacing as he glances back behind him.

“Red Chaos?” The breathy whisper of something he doesn’t understand draws his attention to a pink haired woman behind him, meeting her eyes, a flash of recognition at the sight of one of Sam’s regulars with brown eyes and the raising of her chin.

Don’t look at me, Tommy thinks as her eyes searches his, his shoulders and chest heaving.
Don’t look at me don’t look at me don’t look at me-

He stills as she lifts her hand determinedly to hover it over the emergency stop button.

“Run,” she mouths to him and he lurches into motion, pushing forward and sliding through as the glass doors opens just wide enough to let him through, hearing the commotion behind him as the doors halts, locked in place with the slam of her palm.

Shining lights above him, around him, Christmas jingles still playing over the speakers, lights that drips like the melting snow on icicles around colourful decorations, warm air wrapping around him and-

Fuck, Tommy thinks with something hysterical in his chest as his presence ripples fear and commotion around him, *what the hell am I doing?*

He’s running from Heroes, running from the Enforcers, the very people he had once worked with. *Who he had been part of.*

Every inhale draws his lungs too sharply against the broken ribs in his chest, his throat burning from the sharp breaths through his mask, adrenaline doing its best to mask the pain of every step as he scales the escalator past startled shoppers two steps at a time, scanning the signs above him desperately for the path towards the next exit as he shoves forward, doing his best to dodge the people who *won’t get out of his fucking way-*

“Jester says ten minutes,” Slimecicle whispers to him where he’s holding tight to the fabric of his hood. “You need to get out on the streets, he says.”

Easier said than done, Tommy thinks as he nearly trips over a child, swerving last minute as she’s yanked back by her mother, an apology spared by habit as he twists, backing two steps

to make sure she hadn't gotten hurt, before-

He folds back instinctively, palms flattening down against the floor as a large terrifyingly sharp scythe brushes *far too fucking close*, the handle black wood, blade gleaming wickedly, and he slams his teeth down on the inside of his cheek, ribs screaming in protest as he vaulted backwards, landing with stumbling steps and a wet wheeze that tastes of iron.

He locks eyes with the Hero in front of him as she twirls a handle taller than herself, black and wrapped in thorny vines and pretty white roses, pink see-through wings fluttering behind her where she hovers just inches off the ground, head tilting almost curiously, her mask surprisingly plain, just pink ceramic settled over the upper part of her face.

"Fancy seeing you here, Scarlet." The scythe gets spun, easy familiarity in the motion, and Tommy smells *trouble* as her boots touch down against the ground with a twirl and cheeky smile.

"Rose," he grits out, one foot sliding back, wariness written into every motion. "The *fuck* are you doing here?"

Everything about her is soft looking- pleated skirt brushing over the tall, reinforced boots that settle high on her thighs, the shirt a lumpy thing of gentle pink.

It's a rotten fucking *lie*.

Rose is the Number Five Hero for a fucking *reason* and he has zero interest in engaging her in a fight he's doomed to lose.

Their interactions had been few, marked with a red poppy that wilts on his bedside table after she'd slipped it behind his ear with a wink when she'd caught him stiff and silent in a corner at one of the parties at the tower, pretending not to be watching Schlatt like a fucking *hawk* as the man smiled and charmed with gestures that grew wider, broader, his tone more feverish with every downed glass of wine.

The night ends without drama, Dream contemplative, and then teasing when he'd caught Tommy filling a glass tall with water in the kitchen to slip the poppy into it, the stem too long and drooping over the edge of it.

The wings are a new thing- Tommy had only gotten the news weeks before everything had gone to shit, about Rose who had become a grand spectacle with fairy wings unfolding from her back after her red roses had been leeched off their colour from Eris' withering power, flooding back with pale white and wrapping thorny black vines like a crown on her head where there had once been green.

Eris had disappeared in the commotion of it, golden cape at their heels, and Rose-

Tommy knows that something hadn't gone quite right, the smile sharper when he meets her mere days before his betrayal of Dream, the bright gentleness in her eyes replaced by something far more dangerous, teeth flashing pearly white when she passes him by with a hum, hands clasped behind her back.

“I’m just as surprised as you are!” She spins the handle of her scythe in her hands, regarding him with too wide eyes, false innocence in every motion. “Everyone is looking for you, Scarlet.”

“I told you to stop calling me that,” Tommy bites out, taking a careful step back. “Schlatt send you?”

She tips her head, smiling.

“He’s looking for you, was quite upset that you dared to break into his tower, I hear.”

Tommy stares at her.

“That I fucking *what*- “

Rose moves fast, suddenly, and only instincts ingrained during years of training having him lurch out of the path, her body spinning to bring it down in another slash he narrowly steps out of the path of, heart pounding in his chest as he flicks his gaze, measuring the distance between them and the civilians, one eye on her as he steps back.

People scatters around them at the promise of a fight, many lingering far too close, curious and horrified where they press up against the windows from inside stores with phones focused on both of them.

“Aww, come on now, Scarlet.” Rose’s wings flutters on her back, see through, a pale drained colour with black spreading up through them like the veins of the withering effect. “Give me a bit of a fight at least, get me some good headlines! It’s not everyday one gets to bring in Dream’s former *pet*.”

Instead of giving her what she's asking for, like she no-doubts expect with the coiling tension in her muscles, he pivots around, one hand pressing down against the wooden railing, hauling himself up and pushing away as her scythe tears through the air where his ankles had been, *too late*, and he collides with the large Santa Claus threaded up like a puppet to hang from the ceiling with his reindeer’s empty black eyes focused ahead, dangling awkwardly as it swings.

“If you wanted to play you just had to tell me,” Rose giggles, her feet leaving the ground with the vibration of her large insect like wings as Tommy’s sweaty hands slides down the lumpy body of the plastic Santa Claus, clawing desperately into it to hold on and-

Water spirals violent and sudden out from beneath them both and Tommy freezes, eyes wide as it spreads wide in the shape of an open hand behind Rose who parts her lips, yelping in surprise as it clenched down around her, scythe torn out of her hand, spat out with a clatter of wood and metal as she struggled desperately, clawing fruitlessly through the water that wraps unforgiving around her twisting body.

There’s only one person with that kind of power, Tommy’s chest heaving as he slowly looks down beneath him, to Nemesis who stands at ease in the middle of the floor beneath them, arms spread, water pushing out in a wall around her, forcing civilians to the very edge, and circling in a silent promise of danger, silence thick and fearful eyes on them both.

Her head tilts up, regarding him with a shimmer of her mask and blue eyes, one hand moving, smooth and easy as water unwinds from around Rose who gasps, choking and spluttering as she was left inside a blue prison.

The water is silent as it shifts beneath him into a fist that opens up into an inviting palm with soft curled fingers.

“Jump!” Her voice rings out and Tommy’s knuckles presses white against the plastic of the Santa Claus, meeting the gaze of Rose who jerks towards him, her hair brown and dark from water that drips down her form, something flashing in her eyes as she lurches forward, arm stretching through bars of water with a twist of her lips and-

He lets go.

The water swirls thick to rise and meet him and the panic flares inside of him as it wraps around his body, cradled with a gentleness where there had only been crushing weight in their past, his breath caught as her pink lips, just visible beneath her mask, tips up at the corner before he’s lowered down, slowly, and he’s deposited in front of her with a wobbly step before he drops to his knees, chest heaving and palms pressed flat against the cold flooring.

“Hello Red,” Nemesis greets him in a soft voice as she steps towards him, sinking down on her haunches, a gloved hand reaching out to settle with surprising gentleness on his cheek, tilting his chin up, giving him no choice but to meet her gaze. “Looks like you’ve been having a bit of a rough time since we last saw each other.”

He doesn’t know how to answer her, unable to wrap his head around the fact that he’d been saved from a Hero by a fucking *Villain*, a tremble running through him, and he knows he’s already pushed his body far beyond reason with the fading adrenaline leaving only exhaustion and nausea in its path, a headache prickling sharp behind his eyes.

He jerks his head back, Nemesis regarding him for a moment before letting her hand fall.

“What are you doing here?” Tommy forces out, grasping for hostility but finding only a numb sort of exhaustion that wires around his bones, his mind, and his very heart.

“I always repay my favours,” Nemesis murmurs to him, her voice a quiet thing for him but too loud in the silence as he winces, fingers curling against his gloves, swallowing thickly.

“Thank you,” he mutters, arm pressing against his ribs, unable to look at the faces around him, focusing on the Villain as her head tilts, thoughtful eyes regarding him in turn.

Nemesis straightens up with a swish of her cloak, taking a small step back before offering her his hand, palm open and fingers gently curled.

It’s an offering, something more than Tommy is ready to accept, but he’s *tired*, aching, all too aware that he has no allies to turn to, nowhere to go, and-

He finds himself reaching out, the skin of his burnt palm pressing against the cool softness of hers, letting her fingers tighten and haul him up to his feet with surprising strength, steadied

with a hand on his shoulder that he tenses at.

Nemesis releases him, taking a respectful step back, and Tommy slowly straightens up, drawing one breath after the other in the silence of the mall.

And-

He knows, instinctively, that there's a shift here in this moment, in what he is and represents.

There's nowhere to hide from the civilians around him and he's all too aware of what it looks like, the silence damning from the people drawing their own conclusions around them both as he swallows thickly.

"We- we should get out of here," Tommy fumbles out, off-kilter from the turn of events, from his own choice, and she hums, looking away from him to peer around them both.

"I suppose we should," she acknowledges, stepping forward, and Tommy stiffens as he feels something cool wrap up his leg and down his boot, circling around his ruined foot.

He takes a halting step forward he feels the cushion of her power as he limps after her, falling at her side with an acknowledging flick of her blue eyes.

"Jester send you?" he mutters quietly, watching as her water twisted, catching two Enforcers and slamming them back up against a wall with a flick of her fingers, civilians parting before it could get to them, leaving it to circle shimmering blue and dangerous around them both with the pulsing force of it.

Rose's voice rings out before getting abruptly cut off and Tommy doesn't dare look behind him.

Nemesis has always been a dangerous enemy, people may forget it, but Tommy never does.

"No," she hums. "I happened to be in the area."

"I see," he says awkwardly, not sure what to feel, tugging at his hood as he lowers his head, muscles bunching uncomfortably from the weight of it all.

He's dirty, sweaty, his shoes ill-fit and knotted tight, the leather stained with the leaking blood from his ruined heel, hunched with an arm drawn over the broken ribs in his chest, nausea crawling in his throat as he follows, one step after the other, heart beating wet and hard inside his chest.

"Stand tall," Nemesis tells him in an undertone and he jerks, looking towards her, all too aware of how pale he must look, eyes too wide. "Don't give them more than you have."

Don't let them see your weakness, Dream's voice ghosts at the back of his mind.

It feels damning, the decision made, but there's no way to second guess and regret it, he can only continue onwards, whispers and fearful eyes in their path as he straightens his spine, the

green smiley broad and visible on his back with its crossed eyes as he raises his chin, the limp all but erased with the help of Nemesis who guides his steps.

-

I'm still Dream's, Tommy thinks just a bit desperately as they step into the cold air to the car that rolls up to meet them, black and sleek, windows tinted dark.

Nemesis circles the car as Tommy reaches for the door with a tremble of his fingers, the metal of the handle cold as he presses it up, unlocking and pulling it open to slip inside, settling down heavily on the fancy black leather seat and drawing it shut behind him.

A single brown eye meets his through the rearview mirror.

I'm still Dream's.

“You look like shit,” Jester tells him as Nemesis settles down on his other side, crossing her leg before leaning back, an easy elegance in every motion, like the water she controls.

Tommy's face twists ugly and dark.

“Fuck off.”

-

He breathes in.

Breathes out.

“Center yourself.” When he closes his eyes he can almost feel Dream's palm warm between his shoulder blades, a touch and attention he soaks in hungrily. *“The world is in your hands, Tommy. Whatever you want to be, as long as you're willing to work for it- it's in your reach.”*

It's foolish words, they both know it. Perhaps- it's something Dream wants to believe, bound as he is from an early age to a fate he claws to make his own with Tommy who willingly makes himself his shadow, at his side.

Dream will never be free from the responsibility of being a Hero, never has a choice outside it, pulled into the profession at such an early age it becomes his lifeblood.

How much of his decision to become the Number One Hero is purely *his* is something that never gets broached inside the walls of their home.

Tommy sees the way Dream falters, sees the horror in hands clenching tight in his hair, hunching over on their couch with eyes that stare hollowly at the piles and piles of papers scattered around him with tolls of death as if he could make his own truth out of them.

Life isn't fair, Tommy knows that better than most, and he curls with his spine pressed tight against the back of the couch when he knows his company isn't really wanted but he's unwilling to leave his mentor to face the reality of it alone.

Tommy becomes a Hero for Dream. Willingly.

He bears the weight and horror of it with blood-stained hands, the taste of iron on his tongue that never truly goes away, scraps and scrapes and projectiles dug out of his skin, stitches pulling his skin together in the aftermath of another fight, another near death, another survival.

He learns to turn his eyes from the crying and begging, to find those he can help and leave those he cannot. Learns that he cannot be there to save everyone even when he can damn well *try*, pushing his limits and sanity with fingers that barely grace his before falling from the tumbling tilting ruins of a falling building, his mouth closing and hand falling limp as his chest heaves before he turns and moves to the next person.

Moving, always moving, never a moment to spare for faltering, that's what Dream teaches him, red spiralling and sparkling around him, pushing the limits of his body as he slams into the Villain with his fist already drawn back, grin stretching behind his mask with the crunching on bone beneath his fists, twisting, the world almost slow around him as his feet slide against the ground and-

It's adrenaline, it's *life*, it's something violent and euphoric in the success when he stands and his enemy falls, collapsing on the ground as he lifts his head and seeks out his mentor and the soft glow of pride in bright green eyes.

Red Chaos is the product of their hard work, rebellious and wild, untamed for but the one he follows and even then-

Tommy had stood against Dream.

Had made the decision to protect Siren, a split moment that costs him everything with the cold press of metal in his hand.

"Sometimes we have to make hard decisions, impossible decisions, decisions we regret, and decisions we don't," Dream tells him, head tipping to enjoy the cool breeze on top of the tower as Tommy bites down on his wrap, one leg swinging idly where he sits beside someone who is his friend, his brother, and yet, at the same time, none of those things. *"That's the reality of what it means to be a Hero. All our decisions, even the small ones, have unsuspecting consequences, like the rippling waves of a stone in a pond."*

"Sounds a bit fucked-up," Tommy had said through a mouthful, grinning when Dream's shoulder folded as he wheezed out a startled laugh.

-

"Siren will be harder to find, of course-"

Hard, but not impossible.

The words of the Mercenary circles through his mind where he sits, arm pressing against his ribs, the pain rising with the building headache from blood loss with the fading adrenaline

that leaves something sluggish and dull in its wake, thick like cotton inside his brain.

Why? Tommy thinks with a curling of fingers into the fabric of his hoodie, jaw clenching tight. *Why Siren out of all fucking people-*

Siren had the power to go incorporeal, some sort of phantom hybrid with the blue glow of his skin and the eerie golden shimmer of his eyes, and his voice- he could halt anyone in their tracks with a single word, a single *command*, it's why he'd been coined the Siren in the first place, an irresistible call that could send someone walking straight off a bridge with the soothing lull of cotton.

It was rare that Siren utilized it for such things, at most Tommy had been halted in his path, unable to move, unable to as much as *twitch* as the pads of long fingers pressed against the patch of skin between his mask and goggles with a mocking coo.

Only once had Siren had used it to draw information out of him, when Tommy hadn't been fast enough, the words crawling unwilling out of his throat as those golden eyes watched him with a dark sort of impatience and a pat on his head for the troubles before the Villain fucking *waltzed off*.

It's a terrifying power but it never lasts long, mere minutes at most, long enough for Siren to get what he needed and get away, leaving Tommy panting and shivering in the aftermath, palm pressed flat over his mouth as his chest heaved.

But Schlatt had known about Siren's powers for years now, it was available to anyone within the Hero ranks, even if the public was denied the knowledge outside what had been caught on cameras and said in interviews.

No one needed to know there was a Villain out there who could control their Heroes with his very *words*, it would be public outcry, and it was just one of many things that had been hushed down from the comfortable leather seats in the Hero Tower.

Schlatt is after Siren.

The reality of it is slowly sinking into his bones where he sits in the backseat of Jester's car.

He thinks of the dirty hand that had pressed over his mouth, of the taste of blood that had spilled into his mouth as he bit down to muffle the sound of his screaming and-

He lowers his head, stomach churning because-

If he hadn't protected Siren that night, then he'd still be with Dream, would still have his powers.

Everything circles back to that fucking night, the metal of Siren's gun gold in his hand as he levelled it at his mentor, his palm pressed against the chest of the Villain, feeling the way it rises and falls with shallow breaths that whistles odd behind the mask of the man as he gritted his teeth and glowered at the white smiling mask.

Human, alive, someone Tommy had promised to protect because that's what Dream had taught him.

"Favours repaid and all that."

Fuck if he had, Tommy thinks resentfully, jaw clenching tight.

He'd left the tower without his powers and he'd stumbled his way into Villain territory, the anger wired tight inside of him, and he'd lashed out in the only way he'd known how, helplessly fucking outmatched and he'd *known it* but he *hadn't fucking cared*.

For whatever reason Siren had been there to deal with the aftermath of it, had remained long enough to watch him push out of the dirty alley water and slump back against the brick wall with his arm dangling broken and useless at his side.

Siren had seen Red Chaos at his absolute lowest, miserable and discarded like a dirty mutt without his powers, and he'd held him as he broke down at the realization of what his actions would cost him with Dream's words at his heels as he dragged Siren away in the aftermath of the confrontation he'd only survived because Dream allowed him to.

"You didn't listen to the rules, the rules were simple." Siren's weight is heavy on his back, his mind ringing with the words of his mentor. *"If you leave now, don't bother coming back. You won't like it."*

Words Tommy hadn't headed, returning like faithful dog only to have his powers cut-off, his tools stripped from his body as he desperately demanded answers, hauled back bodily by Sapnap whose mouth is thin, eyes dark and warning as he shoves Tommy away from Dream who is already turning his back towards him.

"I have been nothing but gracious to you." A beat. *"Tommy. Think about what you did."*

And he has. Tommy has done nothing *but* think and-

Siren wasn't the sort to sit around and let himself be manipulated into playing Schlatt's game. The Villain was a silver-tongued son of a bitch, often mocking, teasing and wrapping honey words around those foolish enough to confront him.

Where the Blood God excelled in combat it was the words that made Siren such a dangerous enemy.

Even Tommy had found himself hesitating on more than one occasion, caught and ensnared by the words spoken.

*"We're not doing this for **power**."* A hand around his throat, pinning him against hard bricks, the Villain looming over him, face too close with eyes that gleam golden against the blue stain of his skin. *"Look, do you know how long and how much blood was shed to get L'Manberg to the point it is at? You know what would happen if we manage to get L'Manberg back again? More blood would be shed and we would be the illegitimate rulers of a nation."*

A thumb stroking against the bare skin on his throat.

“No. This isn’t about power, Hero. This is something much bigger and you’re part of it.”
Golden eyes gleaming, pinning him in place as the grip on his throat tightens. *“The question is – are you playing on the right side?”*

Siren’s ability to ensnare those around him was both part of his powers and something inherently *him* and on more than one occasion Tommy had resorted to going straight for the fucker’s jaw to shut him the *fuck up* before he could get talking, something that had both enraged and amused the fucker when he’d gone incorporeal with a laugh and dramatic turn of his dark blue coat

“Oh, look at you! Trying to silence me before I’ve even had a chance to speak? You’re starting to look dangerously like the government you serve, Hero.”

Siren’s ability to get under his skin had more than once left him feeling hollow after a victory, something that had only fed the resentment all the more, escalating the violence between them even as the Angel of Death was often quick to put an end to it with a spread of dark wings and the shining gleam of his blade as Tommy was sent stumbling back.

“Now, now, let’s play nice, alright?” the Angel had chided as Tommy yanked a knife from his belt with a twist to spin it in an outward angle.

“You heard him, Hero.” Always with the mockery, Tommy’s teeth bared behind his mask as red wrapped tight around his body as the Villain turned his back to him with a jaunty little wave. *“I’ll leave the pest to you then, Angel.”*

“Siren!” The Angel blocking Tommy’s path to follow with a bird like tilt of his head as his wings flared out in a rustle of metallic danger, halting the lurch of motion, ridding any sign of the softness that so often drew Tommy’s attention as he froze with a gritting of his teeth.
“Come back here!”

“Sorry to disappoint you but I’m not a fighter, I’m a writer! So I’m just gonna sit this one out!”

It was true that Siren rarely resorted to violence, preferring to leave it to the Blood God and Angel of Death who were rarely seen away from his side when he made public appearances, but it only made him all the more unpredictable.

And Tommy-

Red Chaos had saved his life.

He spreads his palm up, curling his fingers, staring down at his blunt *human* nails.

“Bite me if you have to.” Siren presses his forehead down against the top of Tommy’s head as his breath stutters and chokes, tears spilling from wide open eyes. *“It’s okay, it’s okay, it’s okay- I’m sorry, shit man, I’m so fucking sorry-“*

And-

“We save lives because they all mean something,” Dream’s voice is a resolute thing that rings out over the crowd, silencing them. “You don’t have to agree with me, or even understand where I’m coming from, but- as a Hero it’s my duty to protect all life, not discriminate or judge.”

Tommy tips his head, studying his mentor where he stands, chest rising and falling beneath the lime green of his hoodie, the smiling mask slowly turning over the crowd.

“That means that I’ll protect Heroes, I’ll protect Vigilantes, you citizens, and I’ll do my damn best to protect Villains as well. That is my promise to you. To myself.” The tension slowly drains out of his shoulder. *“I’m not here to play judge, jury and executioner. We Heroes aren’t perfect, far from it, and the decision of who lives and who dies shouldn’t lie in our hands.”*

And Tommy had done his best to live by those words, to see his mentor stand and rise about the rest, eight years of his life dedicated to find his place at Dream’s side and support him.

“He wanted you out of the picture, you know? Was quite insistent about it too. Seemed quite eager to get you as far away from L’Manberg as possible, even if it meant locking you up for a few months.”

Tommy curls his hands tight.

For some reason Dream wanted him out of the picture, had gone so far as to seal his powers away, reducing him to nothing more than a civilian caught in the apartment signed under a fake name, working at a café and getting paid under the table because Sam had taken pity on him.

Dream had always known where he was but he hadn’t said anything, nor had he made any attempt to reach out, and it’s a cruel sort of protection that had removed Red Chaos from the eyes of the world until Tommy donned the mask again.

Only then had Dream acted, to get him *away*, but Tommy-

Tommy isn’t a Hero anymore and he doesn’t have to play by any rules than his own.

“I have a first aid kit.” He jerks, eyes darting to Nemesis who hasn’t moved, studying him with a small tilt of her head. “Your foot is bleeding.”

Tommy clenches his jaw.

“Let Nemesis look at it, man.” Jester’s thumb taps against the wheel where they wait at a red light, craning his head around to look at him. “You’re no use if you’re gonna faint from blood loss.”

He keeps Jester’s gaze, light turning green, before slowly giving a stiff nod.

The owner of Las Nevadas turns back around, flipping his finger at the honking of the car behind him with a low grumble as he pressed down on the gas, and Nemesis bends down, reaching beneath the seat in front of her to pull out a black zip box.

Tommy looks down at the ruined mess of the leather boot, pulling it up, letting his knee rest sideways as he reaches to tug at the hard loops he'd made, and it takes him longer than he wants to finally get them undone.

He stares down at it, clawing down with stiff fingers against the back, teeth sinking into his cheek as he slowly peeled them down, pain crawling white hot up his spine with a sting of his eyes and a hitch of his breath, blinking hard as he stopped, swallowing.

"Let me help," Nemesis murmurs and Tommy-

Tommy can do nothing but stare numbly as his fingers are eased away, Nemesis shifting to pull his foot into her lap, uncaring of the dirt and snow that stains the blue of her cloak as she starts tugging the laces out of the hoops completely, working nimbly as Tommy slowly eases his back against the door of the car.

"What kind of injury?"

"Lava."

Jester hisses a low curse from the front of the car. "*Schlatt?*"

"Yeah," Tommy admits, skin prickling uncomfortably as Nemesis opened the kit, pulling out a scissor. "He's a bit of a bastard," he mutters bitterly.

"No shit," Jester laughs, a startled noise, and there's something personal there, in the way his wings presses tight down against his back, disappearing from his sight behind the car seat. "Slime said that Punz was the one who got you."

"Yeah," Tommy grunts, mouth twisting. "It was a shit kidnapping."

His foot is freed from the leather of the shoe which is dropped aside, the sock he'd stolen eased down until it's left clinging to the grit and dried blood of his heel, her palms cupping it, water pooling to soak into the fabric, a startled breath sucked in and shoulders drawing tight.

Nemesis blue eyes flicks up briefly to meet his before she focuses back on the task.

He doesn't look down at his heel when he feels the fabric of the sock get tugged loose, warm wetness spilling down his skin.

There's a pause, a halting of her movement.

"Jester-"

"It's fine!" Tommy growls.

"- We might need Lemon for this."

Tommy wires tense. "I'm not- just fucking wrap it up, it's *fin*-"

“You’re not fine,” Nemesis interrupts and Tommy glowers at her, teeth baring behind his mask.

“What’s the damage?” Jester asks, voice impossible to read.

“The back heel is burnt badly, I have no idea how he was moving as he was, but it’s possible the nerve endings might be ruined-“ Tension crawls down his spine, something furious bubbling in its path, livid and prickling as Nemesis meets his eyes without fear or reservation. “Your ribs are broken.”

“Fuck off.”

“We’re trying to help you out here, Red,” Jester says with a sigh.

“Then fucking wrap it up,” Tommy snarls. “I don’t need anything else.”

There’s something unreadable in the single eye that finds his in the rear-view mirror, a brief furrow to a brow that smooths out.

“Do what he says.” Jester turns his attention back to the road. “No use arguing with stubborn idiots.”

Tommy bristles but he bites back the retort that claws up his throat, far too aware how dangerous it is to push buttons with the state he’s in, the power dampener a warm reminder against his skin and something he can’t ignore.

Nemesis tips her head. “I need to remove the lava that’s cooled in it.”

“Then do it,” Tommy bites out with frustration. “It’s just- it’ll be fine.”

It has to be fine, Tommy thinks desperately, fingers curling into the fabric of his jeans, knuckles white as Nemesis trades her gloves for black medical gloves, alcohol rubbed over forceps.

“We don’t have any numbing-“

“I don’t want it,” Tommy cuts her off, shoulders bunched tight. “Just- do it.”

Nemesis gives him an unfathomable look. “You’re worse than Siren,” she tells him and Tommy’s retort dies like ash in his mouth as metal grabs and *pulls*.

The palms of his hands finds and digs hard into his eyes as he breathes ragged and open mouthed, shoulders pressing hard against the door to ground himself, the muscles of his legs wiring tense to keep himself from jerking it back as the Villain works, steady and surprisingly gently.

A part of him had half-expected for her to dig it into his skin, to make it worse and yet-

And yet he sits, struggling to keep himself grounded, his breathing too fast, sharp and hard with the expanding of his lungs against his ribs, broken where he’d fallen to escape Schlatt, a

member of the Syndicate cradling his ruined foot in her lap.

Something hysterical bubbles in his chest, palms sliding down over his mask, as if to catch the sound even as he swallows it down.

Tommy forces his muscles to relax, slouching back, head tipped back, eyes on the soft grey interior ceiling of the car when she's finally done, metal placed away, alcohol dosed over his heel, her palm flattening to press a compress up against it, letting it soak in.

It stings but it feels like a distant thing as he swallows the nausea rising in his throat.

"You said you owed me a favour."

The car is silent, a low distant, barely there noise, street lights flickering from outside, and Tommy can't get himself to look at either of the Villains.

"You have to promise," Tommy forces out, "that my involvement stays between the three of us."

He desperately wants to ignore the fact that both people in the car are part of the Syndicate, the antithesis of everything he'd been and represented as the shadow of the Number One Hero, but everything is going to shit and Tommy doesn't know how to stop it all from crumbling around him.

What he *does* know is that he cannot let Schlatt get his hands on Siren.

"What's the favour here exactly, Red?" Jester asks with a tip of his head.

"Promise," he presses tensely.

Jester and Nemesis exchanges a long look before Nemesis inclines her head.

"I promise."

"What she said," Jester huffs. "So?"

"I need to find someone," Tommy bites out even as his chests twists. "But I don't exactly know where the bastard *is* so if you could help me with that I'll call it even."

"Who and why?" Jester asks with a furrow of his brow.

Tommy draws a breath.

Lets it out.

"Schlatt- he's after Siren," he says bluntly. "I intend to find him *first*."

This chapter is roughly 16k unused words I ended up scrapping but here we are! Finally. Just in time for the New Year and- what a year it's been. I never would have expected Hush to grow to this point, but I'm so very happy to have you guys here. Thank you all so much for the support, the joy, the speculations, the art- it's an incredible thing to see and brings me so much warmth.

That said- welcome to chapter 25 of Hush Now where things are picking up in the most delightful of ways :)

:)))

I hope you guys have been having a good year- everything is a bit rough in the world atm but at least there's always fanfics, aye? Much love guys, I hope you all have a wonderful beginning to 2022<3

-

If you're interested there's a [Hush Now Discord](#) that tends to go *brrrr* with the theories in designated channels and also have a lot of fun chatter and chill people on top of scoops of chaos. We arrange movie nights, MCC watching and the occasional game in VC so you're very welcome to join in on it! There's a bit of everything happening tbh and I have some wonderful mods who help keep things running smoothly :)

You can find me on **tumblr** here: [corpse-art](#)
And I'm also on **twitter** now here: [corpsey_art](#)

I post a one hour countdown on all my social medias for a new chapter update if you're interested in such a thing :)

-

DUDES. We have new Hush Now art, an animatic *and* a song inspired by Hush! Tommy and I'm just shfk pls. Its all amazing. You're all amazing. Go and give them all so much love<3

[Nowhere Kid by Trashyinferno](#) Music :)

[Two Birds by tododokiii](#) Animatic :)

[Hero or Villain by eelsonpluto-art](#) Art :)

[We Don't Kill by givemeahug](#) Art :)

[Hushmas Sweater by mothercoyote](#) Art :)

[Cold by PlantChecker](#) Art :)

[FANART MASTERPOST](#)

Chapter 26

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“You’re sure?” Jester is pacing, back and forth in the sports store they’d broken into after the man had slammed the car into an abrupt stop.

The lamp is turned off, the alarm killed before it could make even a sound, and Tommy sits awkwardly on the counter, following the trailing figure of Nemesis piling several boxes of shoes onto a little shelf of silently moving water beside her, before focusing back on Jester.

“That’s what I heard,” Tommy mutters impatiently, reaching into his hoodie to grab for Slimecicle who had been staying suspiciously silent.

The small figure shrinks back, tiny palms framing the tip of his finger, and he pauses as he feels the slimy forehead press against him, head shaking back and forth hurriedly.

He slowly draws his hand back and lets it drop into his lap.

Jester stops with a sharp click of his shoes against the flooring. “There’s a meeting, tonight-“

“He won’t come to it.” Nemesis approaches them both, a jacket on the crook of her arm, and Tommy eyes it. “You know why.” She flicks her gaze to Jester as he turns towards her. “Blood God says he’s been unreachable by phone all day.”

Jester’s gaze flicks to Tommy just as Nemesis throws him the jacket- white, save for the thick stripe over the chest, the collar, and the three looping round marks around the right bicep. “You’re suffering from blood loss, you’re going to start shivering,” she says at his skeptical look. “It’s not the best protection but we don’t exactly carry spare armour in the car.”

“You should,” Tommy bites out as he reluctantly shifts to shrug it on, rolling his shoulders, not bothering to button it up as he stretched his arms out, above and to the sides before letting out a huff of breath.

It’s not the worst and Nemesis is right- he already feels cold and clammy, his stomach working on empty, and he doesn’t know how much blood he’d lost.

“Too many car switches, wouldn’t be sensible,” Jester answers distractedly, fingers tapping over the screen of his phone as he dropped down on one of the cushy seats spread around on the flooring, kicking one leg up over the other. “I have Slime tracking him but Siren is a tricky bastard to pin down.”

“Oh the invisible guy is hard to track down? I wouldn’t have fucking *guessed*,” Tommy huffs, catching the socks Nemesis throws him by easy instinct. “Thanks,” he tells her grudgingly, lifting his foot to eye it with a spread of his toes.

Nemesis had done good work- cleaning out and padding out the wound before wrapping it tight with white bandages tied in a pretty little bow.

It still hurts to walk on but without the lava that had cooled into rocks in the wound, well- Tommy has worked with worse shit and she'd talked him into allowing a numbing cream to be slapped over it which was *okay*.

He could still feel his foot, like she'd assured him, and while he isn't overly enjoying the feeling of it he can admit that it's made it far less distracting.

"Thank *you*." He snaps his gaze to meet blue, shimmering softly, and here in the darkness of the shop they look almost like swirling water casting a very light sheen over the scales of her mask. "Siren is very dear to me," her voice soft as she steps towards him and in a reverse of their positions just an hour early she sinks to her knee. "You owe us nothing, Red Chaos, and yet here you are."

"Here I am," he echoes dully, staring down at the top of her hood covered head. "I'm not doing it for him," he feels the need to correct her, curling his fingers tight around the socks. "I just hate Schlatt more."

"Perhaps." Water sorts through the boxes before slipping out the third one into Nemesis' waiting hands. "But that doesn't change that you told us when you could have kept it to yourself."

"Calling in a favour." It tastes rotten on his tongue, shoulders curling in discomfort as he slumps forward. "Why did you do it?" he asks as she inspects the pair of sneakers, testing out the heel and tugging at the tongue of the sneaker with a hum before discarding them aside.

A new box is slipped deftly into her hands.

"Do what?"

"When-" His tongue feels thick in his mouth but- there's a lot of things that happens during his years as Hero that he doesn't understand. "When you and Blood God cornered Dream and I, that first time, why- you said you were giving him a *message*." She lifts another pair up, taller, turning it around to press beneath the sole of his feet before dropping both aside. "You could have killed us. But you didn't. I just... never understood *why*."

What had been the point of it all?

"The message wasn't for you," Nemesis twists her hand, water disappearing, eyes slowly turning brown with a swirl of her power, water evaporating into the air. "We don't kill pointlessly. Dream was vocal with what he was striving for and a Hero who advocated for not killing indiscriminately isn't going to be on our immediate threat list."

She stretches her hand out and he drops the socks into her hands.

They both know that him bending over wouldn't serve him well and he'd resolutely refused to let her near his ribs. He'd checked them, they're *fine*, and he'd wrapped them as best as he

could beneath his hoodie.

There isn't much that can be done for broken ribs anyway, four of them, at least one or two more cracked from the fall.

"May I ask you something, Red Chaos?"

He blinks down at her, furrowing his brow as he watches her gently slip the sock over his bandaged foot which twitches uncomfortable at the brief brush of her fingers.

"You may," he allows, grudgingly curious.

"Why did you become a Hero?" She doesn't look at him, broadening the opening of the sneakers with a tug of the tongue of it.

He stares down at her- at this Villain who had nearly drowned him at their first meeting and who had saved his life today.

And-

He thinks of Dream who offers his hand, thirteen-years-old, to a feral starved child with bared teeth and blood around his mouth, on his tongue, staining his teeth, red slowly dripping to the ground between them from Dream's wrist and-

"To protect Dream," he answers, the red and white sneaker slipping over his ruined heel with surprising gentleness. "He needed- he needed someone to stand beside him. To-" He blinks, his breath hitching strangely. "To have his back."

"You love him."

And-

I'm not supposed to, Tommy thinks, the words something that goes unsaid between them, spoken so clearly in actions, in sacrifices, in arguments and hoodies crowding up his dresser, but never out loud.

"I owe him *everything*. It's the least I can do," he says instead of answering.

Only- it hadn't been enough, somehow.

"It must be quite the debt," Nemesis observes and he blinks, focusing back on her, his eyes trailing over the golden trim of her blue cloak as she helped him get the other sneaker on. "If you believe you haven't paid it back yet."

"I would be nothing without him." He huffs a breath through his mask. "I wouldn't be alive." He glances up, out the dark windows of the store. "Might as well do something with it, you know?"

"Is it not enough to simply live?" Nemesis wonders.

“I’m his.” Tommy meets her eyes. “I’m *Dream*’s. That’s worth far more than simply *living*.”

Nemesis studies him silently.

“And what happens if you’re not his anymore?”

Then I might as well be dead, Tommy thinks, staring into her eyes for a long moment before looking away.

“Thank you for the help,” he says, because he’s an asshole but not *that* much of an asshole.

Nemesis hums, giving his foot a small pat before straightening up in a single fluid movement.

“Any luck?”

Jester lets out a frustrated breath and Tommy snaps his gaze up, stiffening at the clear frustration visible in the lines of the Villain’s face as he slipped his phone into his pocket, palm rubbing against the back of his neck.

“Well, from what I can gather, no one has heard anything from Siren or the Warden in a good three hours.” Jester’s voice is unimpressed. “Possibly longer so there’s *that*.”

“That’s not unusual though.” Nemesis clasps her hands behind her back and tilts her head. “Have you reached out to Eris?”

Tommy looks sharply to her and Nemesis spares him a glance from the corner of her eyes.

“Busy,” Jester says shortly, something briefly visible in his eyes before he turns to look out the windows to the street. “They’re fine though.”

Nemesis makes a low hum in acknowledgement.

Tommy stares at them, hardly breathing, because if Eris was with the Syndicate-

He doesn’t say anything but his fists clenches tight because wither powers were nothing to laugh at and *fuck*- how far did Syndicate influence stretch anyway? How many Villains were in their web and how many *not* Villains?

Because Tommy- he and Dream had been suspicious about a possible Syndicate plant among one of the top ten Heroes before Tommy even *became* a Hero. There were too much they knew, anticipated, things that didn’t add up or make sense, and the Angel had been a Villain for years before the Siren and Blood God stepped up beside him.

Long enough to plant people in places that could bode nothing well.

Dream

Schlatt

Puffy

Caribou

Rose

Royal

McChill

Boomer

Valorant

404

The top ten Heroes of L'Manberg. Tommy- he already knows that Schlatt is fucking corrupt, that Sapnap is dating a Vigilante and the fucking owner of Las Nevadas *himself*, a Villain working with the Syndicate and-

He has no fucking idea where George is, has no idea what Dream has managed to tangle himself in working with Schlatt of all fucking people, and Rose-

He has no idea what had happened with her, the withering leaving her *off*.

Royal- Royal had at least helped him, Tommy has to cling to that, though what it said for the loyalty of the Heroes in the top ten ranks he just doesn't fucking *know* with him, here, in a fucking sports store with two well-known Villains.

One who had tied his shoes as if he was a goddamn *child*.

He blows a harsh breath, closing his eyes with a grimace at the pounding of his head, the twisting of his lips hidden behind his mask, hood drooping low to shadow his face as he stares down at his fingers, at the small scars and marks on visible fingers that trembles ever so slightly.

There's a clammy sort of cold clinging to him, the familiar strains of having lost too much blood, and he's both hungry and thirsty, exhausted, a part of him wanting nothing more than to ignore the world around him and curl up.

To pretend, for a moment, there's no such thing as Heroes and Villains.

Perhaps- in another world Dream would just have been a normal teenager stumbling upon him, his shoulders unburdened and his laughter loud and unrestrained, face bared for the world to see instead of hidden behind the porcelain smile of his white mask.

Maybe- *maybe* in another world Phil would have found Dream and Tommy and taken them in along with Wilbur and Techno and-

"I want to stay with you," Slimecicle whispers quietly into his ear, a breath with small hand gripping onto the shell of it. "The other me on Jester won't tell."

“You should go with them,” Tommy mutters back silently, flicking dull eyes up to watch Nemesis and Jester who are both tense, words exchanged in sharp undertones to keep him from overhearing. “I can’t protect you.”

“I don’t care.” Slimecicle’s hands tightens. “I want to stay with you.”

Words Tommy wishes he’d told Dream, even with the anger and despair, demanding answers even as he was bodily hauled out of the tower, bracelet locked around his wrist, robbing him of everything.

“Okay,” Tommy agrees tiredly.

Slimecicle’s small hands slips off his ear and he feels the slime slip deeper into his hood, something prickling strange in his chest.

Tommy straightens his back, rolling his shoulders with a breath that expands against his ribs, prickling with a sharp pain that makes his teeth clench tight.

Right.

He lets it out.

He pushes off the counter and lands on his new sneakers, tugging uncomfortably at the fabric of the leather.

It’s the wrong colour, the wrong length, a jacket and not a coat, but all the same- it brings his mind to Wilbur and he falters for just a moment, hand drifting guiltily to his phone in his pocket but-

He can’t get himself to lift it up, to look at it, to see if the phone calls were still happening or if they’d *stopped* and-

He swallows thickly and pushes the thought away because- at least Wilbur was safe, away from Tommy.

“Wherever Siren is, it isn’t here, yeah?” Tommy interrupts Jester who snaps his head towards him, shoulders rigid and small buttery yellow wings flaring on his back. “But- there has to be some fucking way of like, tracking down whatever area he was last seen in or moving towards. He can’t keep up his phantom powers forever.”

Nemesis tilts her head, eyes glittering blue as they find his.

Jester clicks his tongue. “Slime-“

A small head pops up out of the coat pocket of Jester’s button-up, hands slipping over them hem to hang like a small dog.

Brown eyes behind glasses meet his for just a moment before the head tilts all the way up to look at Jester. “Last we saw him he was moving south.”

“And how long ago was that?” Nemesis asks, her voice a soft murmur to the Slime.

“Two hours ago.” Slime drops its head with a worried little curl of his mouth.

“What about Schlatt?” Jester asks impatiently. “Or- Punz, they can’t turn invisible.”

Slime tips his head, a beat and then- “They’re still at Schlatt’s tower.”

“What about *Dream*?” Tommy demands before Jester can open his mouth again, heart pounding in his chest with the sudden settling realization and-

Brown eyes meet his behind small glasses, brows furrowing in the midst of green.

“Dream left the tower ten minutes ago,” the slime reports after a long moment. “He’s moving in the direction of the southside port.”

-

“We need to call someone-“

“Even if we do, they’re not going to be fast enough, the meeting is being held in the opposite fucking direction- DAMN IT!” Jester presses harder on the gas and Tommy cranes around in his seat, peering out the window as the car swerves suddenly and violently. “Of all the fucking days-“

“Nemesis,” Tommy sinks back in his seat, glancing towards the Villain with a quiet swallow. “Do you have any spare weapons in here?” he asks in an undertone as Jester squashes his phone between his shoulder and ear, his slime scrambling up to help push it up.

She considers him with unreadable eyes.

“Why?” she asks even as she bends down, her hand creeping beneath the seat. “You’ve never used any before.”

“Yeah, well, I’m not in the best condition,” Tommy breathes out tensely. “And I’d rather not be taken by surprise anymore than I have tonight.” He gestures loosely to his foot.

She hums, gaze lingering, but there’s a quiet *click* and she slides out a rectangular box that she passes over and he blinks down at it, carefully prying the lid off.

He stills.

“It’s one of Siren’s,” Nemesis leans forward, fingers trailing gently over the metal.

It’s the first time he’s seeing up close in person, without blood staining its handle, and he stares at the tree of L’Manberg engraved on the handle of it, almost mockingly with the spindly branches strangely elegant where they spread out against the image of rays in a half-sun against a backdrop of dark blue. The tree itself is white and where the trunk spirals down into roots the background trades out into red, the entire thing wrapped in a round wall of yellow.

It's engraved against the black leather of the handle, hidden with the wrap of Siren's fingers around it whenever it had been levelled against him with a cocking of the Villain's head.

Tommy takes it out gingerly, his thumb pressing down against the trunk of the tree and-

What possible reason could it be for Siren to pick *this* design out of everything-? Was it a mockery? Some sort of *statement*? Siren had always had a flare for the dramatics but-

He swallows as his fingers slowly wraps around the handle, feeling the cool press of the metal, the feel of the leather against the middle of his palm, the weight a terribly familiar thing in his hand.

The last time he held one like it he'd fired it, the bullet piercing through his mentor's shoulders, leaving blood seeping and wet into the green fabric.

"I can't-" His breath chokes in his throat as he shoves it back into the box, reaching for the lid-

Nemesis hand wraps around his wrist, firm but not bruising, and Tommy locks his gaze with brown eyes far too close as a tremble runs through him, Jester's voice a backdrop of muffled words as she squeezes his wrist and leans closer, so close that he can feel the warmth of her breath against his ear and-

"I don't know why you didn't use your powers to get away in the mall," she murmurs, so quiet he has to strain to hear it. "But whatever the situation is that we're heading into it's unpredictable and back-up is going to take time to arrive." She twists her hand, tangling their fingers together with a squeeze. "You're not alone," she tells him. "You saved his life, I owe you more than a promise to do the same again and my silence."

"You can't promise me *shit*," Tommy hisses back with a coil of fury. "I don't know what the hell is going on but whatever this is, I'm still with Dream, even it means I have to fucking pry him out of whatever mess he's gotten himself wrapped up in the first plac-"

"Even if it means letting Siren die this time?" she cuts him off and he sucks a sharp breath against the prickling pain of his ribs. "You gave up everything to protect him, you're not the sort to just throw it all away."

"You don't know me," he hisses. "What the fuck do I know- maybe Dream *was* right and all of this was for *nothing*." He snaps his mouth shut, struggling against the anger crawling so thick up his throat it threatens to choke him. "Maybe- maybe I was the fucking idiot all along," he spits out with a furious glower.

"If you truly believed that," Nemesis says with a curl of her lips, "then you wouldn't be here, not like *this*. And you wouldn't have gone into Syndicate territory just to deliver a Vigilante, staying long enough to make sure he was safe." Her voice is soft, almost airy, his own breath ragged and rough in his chest. "You're more than the man you swear your loyalty to, Red Chaos."

“You’re wrong.” He yanks his wrist roughly out her grasp and she allows it, spreading her fingers in a gesture of surrender as she eases back. “You’re wrong because- there fucking *is* no Red Chaos without Dream.” He narrows his eyes. “I’m *his* so are you really going to trust me with his- with Siren’s fucking *gun*?”

“Yes.”

His mouth snaps shut behind his mask and he stares at her, anger leaving him a rush, caught wrong footed by the simple succinct answer.

Her mouth tips at the corner.

“You’re not the only one who puts their faith in people, Red Chaos.” Her eyes gleams and there’s warmth in the blue of her eyes, swirling like the water beneath the ice of Pogtopia.

Discomfort settles heavy inside of him. “You’re- the fuck are you on about?”

“Take the gun.” Jester’s voice makes him jerk, meeting his eye in the rear view mirror. “I don’t know what the hell we’re heading into but Schlatt is heading in the same direction. We’re going to have to move quick.”

Tommy clenches his fists.

“Just get Siren the fuck out of there, leave Dream to me.”

Jester snorts. “Yeah, we can try alright but Siren is a stubborn bastard.” His eye gleam. “You’ve got that in common with him.”

Tommy scowls. “Don’t compare me to that fucker.”

-

“Why are you like this?” Sapnap curses as he drags Tommy up to his feet, shouldering his weight with an impatient look that twists with fear when his head lolls, eyes fluttering shut with a wet hiccup of blood. *“He would have been fine! He would have- god-fucking-damnit, Tommy, just hold on, alright?”*

There are times when Tommy catches himself, when he pauses to consider the warped sort of all-consuming loyalty that resides inside his chest.

“That kind of loyalty can’t be bought for money.” Schlatt’s eyes burns in his memory, filled with fury and hunger alike as he looks at him, at Dream’s side. *“How did you do it?”*

He seldom choses to linger on it because Tommy plays his cards in a world that is cruel and merciless and he plays them *right*.

“He cares for you, more than he wants to admit to.” George’s voice a waspish thing tinny in his earpiece. *“He can’t afford to be looking after you when he’s busy staying alive. You need to do better or all of this is gonna come crashing down.”*

He's sixteen, there's a wound in his thigh bleeding sluggishly, wet and gleaming despite the dark fabric, and he shifts his right leg back to hide it from his mentor who stands tall beside him, wind tugging at the fabric of his green hoodie.

Secrets where there aren't supposed to be secrets, the weight of being Number One in a world that can't decide if it loves him or hates him, Dream and Tommy both caught in the web of it, snared with their respective identities.

"You never stop, Dream! That's your fucking issue!" Sapnap's anger is a sharp thing that rings in the silence as Dream falters, stepping back as Tommy raises his head to look at the younger of the two men. *"It's like you don't have an off-button, you just- you can't carry the world on your own, you're not Atlas, you're just Dream."*

-

I love you, he thinks in the dark of the night, curled up and staring at Dream's back as the older boy sleeps restlessly, brow furrowing in his sleep and fingers twitching.

Thank you for finding me.

-

Tommy is stumbling out of the car before it's come to a proper halt, the leather jacket left behind on the seat, his fingers clenching in the neon green scarf around his neck as he halts, staring at the back of the hoodie that matches the shade near perfectly.

The sky is dark above them, clouds ominous gray where they span across the sky, waves splashing up against the side of the dock from the rush of air that nips and tugs at his skin with a clenching of his teeth.

Dream-

Dream looks somehow, impossibly, exactly the same- his shoulders loosely relaxed beneath the fabric of his hoodie which is tugged up, hiding the blond of his hair, his hands in his pockets, strips of energy wisping around his limbs in a silent warning of danger, ready to react at the slightest hint of need to.

Tommy steps forward but a hand locks tight around his wrist and tugs him back and he snarls, twisting on Jester who flares his wings straightening with a narrowing of his one visible eye with a sharp clack of his teeth, like the snap of a beak.

"Fucking- chill for a bit," Jester hisses in an undertone as Nemesis steps up, water twisting around her.

"Looks like we've got company," Siren's voice is a mocking little thing in the air and Tommy's head snaps towards him, violence bubbling hot beneath his skin as he locks eyes with golden with a tilt of the man's head.

The Villain's skin is glowing soft blue, almost transparent in places, a simple red beanie crammed down on his head. A dark blue coat flares at his knees and the red trim makes it

look almost military, arms spreading out theatrically at his side with a splaying of his palms, a mask slotted over his mouth and nose.

“Even your little dog is here, isn’t that right, little Red?” Siren’s voice echoes strangely, almost distant, and yet far too close. “You should greet him, Dream! He’s come all this way for *you*, after all. It would be very impolite to ignore him.”

Tommy bristles even as he falters, glancing towards Dream who makes no move to turn and acknowledge him.

His mouth twists behind his mask.

“So much for Hero hospitality I suppose,” Siren sighs, slipping his hands into his pockets. “Nemesis, Jester- you both came for little ‘ol me? You shouldn’t have. My *friend*, Dream here, and I have simply been having a conversation.”

“Last time you two met up you were trying to kill each other,” Jester’s hand is still locked tight around his wrist and Tommy glances at him, stomach curling at the way the Villain’s shoulders are drawn tight, wings flattened down.

“A misunderstanding I’m sure.” Siren waves a dismissive hand. “He was just about to leave. In fact.” A pause, Siren turning to Dream with a gleam of his golden eyes. “*Go back to your-* “

“Your powers won’t work on me,” Dream cuts him off, sudden and so unexpected that Tommy jerks, drawn to the familiar comforting voice of his mentor with a breath that chokes in his throat at the press of broken ribs.

“Well.” Siren sways, looking quite surprised with a blink of his eyes. “Well, that’s a bite *rude*, wouldn’t you say? You could have told me that earlier, you know.” There’s something dangerous in the way Siren shifts, leaning forward, one hand rising to tap thoughtfully against his mask. “I don’t suppose you could just be a good friend and scuttle back to where you came?” Siren tips his head.

“You know why I’m here,” Dream’s voice is short, so different from what Tommy knows it to be, almost clipped, the arcs of green thickening where they’re zipping and wrapping around him.

And-

It isn’t right.

“Anyone going to bother sharing with the class what’s going on?” Jester asks tersely as Nemesis slinks closer to Siren who tips his head in acknowledgement, getting an answering smile from her lips.

“Dream-“ Tommy’s voice rings too loud as he shakes off Jester’s grip. “I don’t know what the fuck is going on but-“

“You shouldn’t be here.” For the first time Dream turns to acknowledge him, boots shifting on the ground as his mentor turns fully towards him. “Go home.”

Tommy stares at the white mask and the lopsided smile in black.

“Hey now-“ Siren takes a step forward but Nemesis water curls around his wrist, tugging him back.

“I told you-“ Tommy dodges Jester’s swipe to yank him back, ignoring the pain of his heel as he steps forward with a stubborn settling of his shoulders. “I promised that I would always be by your side, Dream.” He halts, just steps from his mentor. “I’m not going *anywhere*. Not until you tell me what the *hell* is going on.”

“Yeah, share with the class, green boi.” Siren drawls, raising his wrist with a slanted look at Nemesis. “I’m quite curious myself-“

“Shut up,” Tommy snarls at the Villain, meeting golden eyes. “Just- fucking- shut up, *please*-“ his voice cracks, his breath too fast and heart pounding inside his chest.

Something unreadable flashes in those golden eyes and Tommy swallows as the Villain shrugs, taking a step back with a miming of zipping his mouth shut.

Tommy snaps his head towards Dream who is still watching him silently, unmoving.

“Dream-“ Tommy tries, taking another step closer, so close now that he can almost reach out and touch the green hoodie. “Dream- please, I don’t- I don’t understand but I’m still *here*. All you- all you have to do is tell me and we can figure this out.” He swallows thickly. “Together. Please.”

“You never listen.” Tommy flinches. “Go *home*. ”

“You *are* my home,” Tommy snaps back, clenching his hands tight. “So- fucking *stop* trying to push me away.”

Dream’s head tips to the side. “One last warning.”

Something cold curls through Tommy but he straightens his shoulders and braces his feet. “I’m not leaving you,” he insists stubbornly.

“Dream- chill out for a minute, man.” It’s Jester, his voice tense behind Tommy. “I’m sure there are other ways to solve this than- whatever the hell this is. I have *connections*. If this- if Schlatt has some sort of hold on you-“

“You’ll what, *save me*?” There’s something strange in the depth of Dream’s voice, a strained sort of mockery and derision. “You couldn’t even save yourself, *Jester* of Las Nevadas.” There’s a strange emphasis on the name, a curling of Dream’s tongue, and Tommy slowly turns his head to stare at Jester who has gone eerily still. “Schlatt has told me plenty about you,” Dream continues, and there’s something cruel in the twist of his voice, so unfamiliar, misplaced in the man Tommy knows and follows. “He’s told me all about how *desperate* you were for his attention, the *lengths* you’d go-“

“Schlatt is an abusive piece of shit if that’s what you’re getting at,” Jester bites back, eye narrowed. “And it looks like we’re not too different you and I, right Dream?” Jester’s voice is all bite with a gleam of his eye. “Because it looks to me that he’s got you at his heel like a loyal little *pet*.”

Dream goes very, very still.

“Say that again,” he challenges and there’s a chill in the air, energy zipping up his body, neon green. “I *dare* you.”

“Dream-“ Tommy takes a step out, spreading his arms, blocking Jester from sight, heart pounding. “Schlatt is on his way *right now* but- all we need to do is leave-“

“He’s not going to listen to you.” Siren phases through the water grasping to his wrist with a flicker of his body, his shoes clicking against the pavement as he shrugs, coat swishing behind him. “He’s made his choice!” He spreads his hands dramatically. “It took him a few years but he’s proven himself just as corrupt as the system he serv-“

“He’s not!” Tommy bares his teeth furiously behind his mask. “You don’t know *shit*-“

“And you do?” Siren’s eyes gleams as they meets his with a tip of his head. “Because it seems to me you’re just clinging to him like a *child*.”

“Fuck you.” Tommy curls his fingers tight. “If it wasn’t for *you*-“

“And now you’re blaming me!” Siren laughs and there’s something startling familiar in the way his head tips back, something that makes Tommy falter, staring at him. “Of course you are, Red! Because it couldn’t *possibly* be that you Heroes take some responsibility for your own actions. No! It’s all me, all this time, pulling the strings behind the scenes.” Tommy stills at the bright mania in golden eyes. “Tell him, *Dream*, tell your little dog what you told me before they turned up here.”

Tommy doesn’t have a chance to open his mouth, to ask, confusion wiring through him and then-

Pain explodes through him and he slams back against the ground, sliding several meters before he comes to an abrupt halt, frantically sucking short shocked breaths as he curls his arms around his ribs and rolls to his side, eyes locking onto Dream who slowly lowers his foot, green energy circling thick around him.

Tommy hadn’t even seen him move, tasting blood in the back of his throat as he struggles to get up, wobbling dangerously before he spreads his feet out to brace himself.

Blue cards swirls to life, spreading out in a shield in front of him but Tommy doesn’t look away from his mentor.

“Well, that’s one way to deal with him,” Siren drawls, a note of surprise in his voice.

“Dream-“ Tommy takes a step forward and this time he catches the zip of green, the blur of motion, turning *too fucking slow*, barely getting his arms up in a cross as he feels the fist

collide hard enough that he feels his feet leave the ground, slamming back against bricks, air forced out of his body from the shock of it.

He sinks to his knees on the ground gasping for breath, eyes wide and mouth open and-

Distantly he hears some sort of commotion but he can barely get enough air down his lungs, coughing and hacking up blood that stains the inside of his mask as he wraps both his arms around his chest, trembling, shock wiring deep through him as he raises his gaze to blurrily focus on the steps that halts in front of him.

Tommy blinks wetly, sucking a desperate wheezed breath.

“Don’t get up,” Dream tells him in a low voice. “You’ve done enough.”

Tommy presses one palm down against the pavement, world wobbling dangerously around him as the cold spreads around his fingers, heaving himself up with a desperate push, gagging at the pain that spreads through him as he stumbles before catching himself, slowly, aching, trembling as he finally straightens himself up.

“Giving up is the same a death,” Tommy gasps out, laughing half-deliriously. “*You* taught me that.”

“Siren!” Schlatt’s voice is an unwelcome thing and Tommy snaps his head to the Number Two Hero as lava twists through the air, towards Siren who steps back, Nemesis’ water twisting up to spread in a wall in front of him- the sizzling loud as the opposing forces collides, steam rolling out in a hot cloud of vapor. “Come out and face me like a man!”

“Well,” Siren claps his hands together, taking several steps back. “I think that’s my sign to get the fuck out of here.”

“Oh so *now* you’re being sensible,” Jester growls in irritation as his cards circles out around them.

Siren’s eyes finds his, hand already raising in a familiar jaunty little wave. “Sorry, little Hero, but looks like you’re gonna have to figure this one out yourself.”

And- what else had he expected, really?

“That’s not-“ The world feels strangely distant around him, his hearing tunneling. “That’s not very *poggers* of you,” he laughs, a bubbling wet sound that tastes of blood.

Siren halts, eyes turning wide to meet his, something startled Tommy doesn’t understand in his gaze as Tommy fumbles for the gun stuffed in the back of his jeans-

“To-“

Tommy’s world explodes with pain and he doesn’t stay awake long enough to feel his body hit the ground.

Steps against the wet ground, pausing beside him, and Tommy's fingers twitches, eyes cracking open just a sliver-

He chokes in shock as his hoodie is grasped, his breathing rough and whistling as he's hauled bodily into the air, fingers clawing down on the armoured wrist, his own blue eyes reflected in the tinted visage of the familiar gasmask as he freezes in place.

"You're still alive then." His vision tunnels, nausea crawling up his throat. "Good," Warden rumbles, dragging him closer. "You owe me some answers and perhaps, if I'm feeling merciful, I will allow you to live after you've given them to me."

Chapter End Notes

For those of you who are curious my dear ghosty have made the L'Manberg tree design which you can find here: [tree of l'manberg](#)

And on that note :)

Hi :)

How ya'll doing after this chapter, hm? :)

-

If you're interested there's a [Hush Now Discord](#) that tends to go *brrrr* with the theories in designated channels and also have a lot of fun chatter and chill people on top of scoops of chaos :)

You can find me on **tumblr** here: [corpse-art](#)
And I'm also on **twitter** now here: [corpsey_art](#)

I post a one hour countdown on all my social medias for a new chapter update if you're interested in such a thing :)

-

DUDES. We have new Hush Now art!! They're all amazing. Go and give them all so much love<3

(and if i ever miss linking your art- pls let me know!! i try to make sure i keep track of everything but i am but human)

[crimebois by plantchecker](#)

[FANART MASTERPOST](#)

Chapter 27

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It's not kindness that has him hauled up with one arm around his shoulders, the other beneath his knees, his head rolling to knock against the gold of the Warden's armour with a choked wheeze and a twitch of his limbs, an useless attempt to try and curl on himself-

"Be still." It's a short, hard command, the voice metallic and echoing.

When Tommy was fourteen it had haunted his nightmares and even now there's times when he wakes up in the middle of the night, hand pressing against the three round holes beneath his ribs, unable to forget the feeling of being pinned down and made a mockery, a curiosity, his life so easily dismissed in the world he struggles to find his place in.

The scent of gunpowder itches at his throat as he stares blankly up at the gasmask, at the prongs of the trident that gleams behind the Warden's head, his vision tunneling strangely and so out of it he doesn't know what to do or feel.

It's a struggle to put one and two together and he's shivering badly from a mix of blood loss and sheer fucking *cold*.

His clothes are all drenched, clinging uncomfortably to his skin.

He has no recollection of what's happened. All he has is the black spiraling towers of cooled lava rising around them and crunching beneath the heavy boots of the Villain holding him, everything around them eerily silent save for the rush of waves against the portside.

"Where's-" His breathing is short and whistling from the punctured lung in his chest, nausea crawling uncomfortably up his throat. "What happened?" The words come out slurred and thick, breaking half-way with a wet cough that splatters blood on the inside of his mask which- fucking *disgusting*.

Old blood crusts around his lips, flaking uncomfortably, and he desperately wants a shower.

Judging by the look from the Warden he's not about to get one anytime soon.

"*You* happened." Fingers, tipped with metal, digs into his arm and he jerks weakly, forehead bumping against cold metal with a groan of protest. "You and *Dream*."

Tommy pants wetly, shivering. "What- the *fuck*-"

"Jester, Siren and Nemesis are all missing." The fingers digs deeper, bruising his skin, an unforgiving tinted visor staring down at him. "Jester sent out a distress signal and imagine my *curiosity* when the only thing I found was *you*."

Thing.

Tommy winces as the fingers dig in with a warning squeeze before relenting without remorse as he blinks wetly, sweat on his brow despite the cold that's sunk its claws bone deep into him.

"You're in luck, Hero." Warden's voice is a dark curling promise of pain. "It just so happens to be that I have a healer on hand so you won't be dying anytime soon. Not until you've given me the answers I want." The gasmask gleams down at him and Tommy is starting to hate his own reflection in it. "And by then I'll have you *begging* for it."

There's a dissonance in the words where he lies, almost cradled in the Warden's arms, feeling the rhythmic lull of his firm and heavy steps and the brush of cold wind over his body.

"Don't get up."

"You've done enough."

Tommy let's his eyes slide shut.

-

The next time Tommy jerks to awareness it's with hands pinning his wrists flat above his head, his wet hoodie peeled up as he jerks instinctively as a palm presses flat against the bruised and broken mess of his chest-

"Be still."

He trembles and the grip around his wrists tightens until he can feel his bones grinding together-

"Hey now, wait a minute, don't you go make more work for me." There's a tinge of unsure laughter to the words, an attempt at diffusing the situation as heat licks up his cold skin-

He's disorientated, hungry, nauseous, and cold and every instinct inside of him is screaming to lash out, to twist and dig nails and teeth into the one holding him, his chest heaving in short static breaths, his ruined heel making itself reminded as he kicks out-

A growl, the scent of gunpowder filling his lungs, and Tommy's brain blanks out at the *snap* of bones, his chest arching with a choked cry and a prickle of wetness, heaving in shock that wires tight up his spine.

"I warned you," the Warden rumbles, making no move to release the pressure of his right wrist which hangs limp in his grasp. "*Behave* or I'll break the other one as well."

"Warden." Something chiding and disapproving in the depth of it. "You said you wanted him in one piece-"

"I told you to heal his ribs and ribs only." Warden's voice is short. "Anything else doesn't matter."

A sigh, a shuffle of feet as Tommy stares up at the ceiling, whining as he feels things fucking *move* inside his chest, sucking a wet gasped breath-

“He might choke in his mask,” the Healer observes with concern. “His lung was punctured and he needs to cough up the blood.”

“He can swallow it.”

“It doesn’t work like that and you *know it*. ”

Silence, and then Warden huffs a breath and a heavy hand settles on top of his mask and Tommy stares at his own too wide eyes in the tinted visage of the gasmask.

“Don’t get me wrong, Hero.” The invisible seam in his mask splits open, hands pressing against his back to help him roll to his side. “It’s not out of kindness I don’t unmask you.”

There’s certain things that in the profession of Heroes and Villains that goes unsaid- an honour code of favours and things that aren’t done.

Schlatt wouldn’t have hesitated to unmask him.

Warden, even now, allows him this safety and Tommy lets his eyes fall shut, choking and gagging as the warmth of the Healer’s powers once against floods his body, focused on his ribs and lungs, an invasion that feels strange where it stretches out inside of him as he trembles, his lungs encouraged to expel the blood that had gathered inside of it with wet wretched coughs.

“It’s okay,” the Healer soothes. “I’m almost done.”

“Lemon-“

“I’m a Healer, Warden.” There’s a strain to the voice, a daring sort of challenge. “I will do this because it is in my contract but you do not get to ask more of me.”

Tommy trembles, sweaty and weak as he’s eased back, his mask closed shut, eyes fluttering weakly closed.

Fingers ghost over his ribs and he flinches weakly, flattening down in an attempt to get away from them-

“He’s only been a Hero for two years, right?”

“He signed himself up for it willingly,” Warden rumbles warningly. “Don’t forget that he’s part of the same people who kept you locked up.”

“I know.” The fingers disappear with a sigh. “I just- we don’t know definitively that he knows anything, right? He could just be wrapped up in things- it’s not impossible!”

Warden huffs a breath and Tommy feels himself get hauled up, a strange dissonance and heaviness to his body as his head rolls against Warden’s chest, shivering weakly.

“You’ve done what I needed from you.”

“So I’m, what, supposed to go home and wait for you to call me again?” Steps against the floor, light flickering over his face, the sounds of another pair hurrying to catch up beside them. “Listen, I’ll stick around- you brought food last night, right? For the meeting?”

“I did.”

“Well, then! It’s mine now.”

“*Lemon.*”

“Don’t you Lemon me, *Warden*. I know what I signed up for with my freedom and-“ A lowering of his voice. “I know, I know you’re worried about Jester. I am too! So I- I understand it.”

There’s silence for a long moment before the steps halts and he’s shifted into an awkward one-hand hold-

“Lemon.”

“Oh! Right, right- I won’t look. I promise. *See-* eyes fully covered!”

A breath, almost fond, and there’s a click, a heavy door opening up, and Tommy feels himself get lowered down on something soft, back eased against something cold and hard.

Oh- he’s sitting-

“Oh so you have him a mattress at least. Makes it almost homey. If you- I mean, if you *squint*, maybe.”

There’s a rustle, arms wrenched behind him, metal sealing around his wrists, his right protesting with pain that wires up his arm, but he can’t get himself to do much more than twitch in response to it, so out of it he can barely make sense of where his feet are, energy thoroughly zapped.

A bit distantly he remembers that Healers, at least in the few cases he knew of, used the energy of the person being healed- pushing rapid cell growth and nudging things back in place and-

Dream had-

“Should I-“

“You’re done. Leave.” Short, rough, and then- firmer. “You don’t want to see this.”

Tommy weakly cracks an eye open at the sound of a door closing shut, struggling to reorientate himself as the Warden’s hand wraps around his jaw, splitting the seam of his mask with far too much familiarity.

Tommy's senses prickles in danger.

He makes a weak attempted at jerking back but Warden's grip is firm enough to bruise and his energy is drained to nothing, his head tilted back and gloved fingers prying his mouth open, ignoring the low growl that builds weak in his chest alongside a pounding panic.

"S-top-" The words breaks in the fingers that presses into the first knuckle, far stronger than him, and he's left unable to do anything as a flask is raised to his lips and tipped into his mouth.

The liquid spills over his tongue, down his throat despite a desperate curling of his tongue, and his nose is too clogged to draw a breath through as he chokes, gagging, the Warden watching him through the tinted visor of his gasmask as Tommy is forced to swallow it all down.

His mouth is inspected and then allowed to close shut with a weak snap of his teeth.

"Good boy," the Warden mocks, as if to a fucking *dog*, and Tommy wheezes miserably as his mask once again seals shut.

"Wh-at-" His tongue feels too heavy in his mouth and he blinks, a tremble running up his spine, a strange sense of slowness enveloping his thoughts and body, a groan, pitiful where it crawls up his throat, echoing in the voice changer of his mask.

"Weakness potion." Warden tips his head, a thumb dragging just beneath his eye, the metal cold against his skin. "Wouldn't want you using your powers, after all."

The irony is almost enough to drag a snort out of him, if he had the energy for it, but instead he blinks as he's eased back against the wall, shivering in his wet clothes.

"I'll bring you something to eat," the Warden says finally, easing himself up, a looming shadow in the dimly lit bare room with only a mattress on the floor. "I hope you like potatoes."

-

The hour feels like an eternity of passing time.

His thoughts feels too slow, his body repulsively weak as he yanks at the chain behind his back before giving up, one hand limp and useless, the other barely able to muster enough energy to pick at his nailbeds where he lies, on his side, staring at the door.

Anxiousness curls inside of him and he squeezes his eyes shut.

Despite everything, it's still Dream that hurts the most.

It gnaws inside of him, the short words, the pain of his ribs, scrubbed away with the Healer's powers but still painted in splotchy dark bruises on his skin.

"Jester, Siren and Nemesis are all missing."

Missing. Not dead.

Tommy curls as best as he can, pressing his forehead against his knees.

Jester and Nemesis- they wouldn't have been there if it wasn't for him. And he'd been nothing short of fucking *useless*.

Is this it? He stares at the dark fabric stretching over his skinny knees. *Is this all I could do-*

Two months of no contact, stuck in his apartment, wondering what the hell he'd done *wrong* and now-

"You didn't listen to the rules, the rules were simple."

"If you leave now, don't bother coming back. You won't like it."

"I have been nothing but gracious to you."

"Tommy."

"Think about what you did."

He knocks his forehead weakly against his knees because there's something he's missing, there *has to be*. Something in Dream's desperate desire to get him the fuck away, something in the fact that he'd been left behind despite that Schlatt had been *right there*, and-

Siren.

Why that fucking bastard, out of all Villains-

The chain is barely long enough to let him roll onto his back and he stares up at the ceiling, a helplessness he despises curling inside his chest.

He feels like a dog gnawing at a bone that's long lost any meat on it, a desperation to ease the hunger in his gut, the longing for Dream, the desire for everything to go back to what it had been, where he'd stood, sure at his mentor's side, knowing that- everything was fine was long as he had Dream.

Everything- everything had been worth it for Dream and yet-

For the first time he finds that, it doesn't feel so right in his chest, the reality of his situation something he can't ignore no matter how much he desperately wants to.

The feeling of his already ruined ribs breaking under the neon green energy of Dream's power and-

He'd been left behind, on the concrete, to be picked up by the Warden and-

It tastes like betrayal. Bitter and acidic on his tongue, impossible, because Dream-

He wasn't supposed to-

Tommy thinks of Wilbur.

Wilbur with his knowing eyes, an offered kinship and understanding of his very soul, who touches him as if could leave blue imprints on his skin, just like he'd painted the walls of Tommy's bedroom with nature and animals to fill the void and emptiness of Dream's absence.

And-

"I want to know everything there is to know about you, to carve you open and bare, to make you tell me all there is to know. I want to know what makes you sad, I want to know what makes you happy, I want to hear you laugh, cry, I want to hear you scream."

"I want you to trust me, wholly and utterly."

"I've got you." The softness of Wilbur's sweater beneath his cheek, the press of his chin on the top of his head as he dared to put his trust, for just a moment, in the hands of a man who offers so much when Tommy gives so little.

Wilbur's words haunts him where he lies, bound and shivering in his drying clothes, weakness potion wiring through him, an unnecessary precaution because he has no powers to draw on anyway, Dream made fucking *sure* of it.

He can't feel his phone and he can only guess that Warden had removed it- he doubts it would work anyway, he's fucking soaked, and he has no idea *why*. Has no idea what had gone down when he'd been out cold like a fucking-

Tommy blows out a harsh breath, his thoughts trailing to whatever the hell it was that he'd found at Schlatt's tower but-

He hadn't even had time to look at it and the regret is a dull thing in his chest.

He frowns, shifting his head, struck by a sudden thought-

"Slimecicle?"

Silence is his only answer.

Tommy struggles to get his knees beneath him, curling his back and pressing his forehead down against the mattress to level his weak body up, his stomach swooping with a gag that gets caught in his throat and he pants open mouthed for a long moment before daring to drop back against the wall.

"Slime?" He rustles the chain, twisting his head to tug at the fabric of his hood against the wall. "Charlie?"

More silence, stretching inside the room.

He swallows.

“Slime?” His voice breaks. “If- if you can hear me-“

There’s no answer and Tommy, strangely, feels his lip quiver, blinking wetly as he stares down at the floor, swallowing thickly, his heart like a physical weight inside his chest as he draws his knees up to burrow his face into them, shivering.

-

“I’m sorry,” he whispers quietly, but to who, he doesn’t quite know.

-

Tommy jerks as the door opens up, momentarily thrown, and he nearly slumps sideways, one leg kicking out a bit uselessly with a twitch of his limbs as his ruined heel dug into the mattress to keep himself upright as he blinks furiously with the flick of a lamp turning on above him.

Warden steps inside, a tray in his hand, door locking shut behind him and-

Tommy stares up at him- at the golden armour gleaming, the trident on his back like a promise, and the gasmask leaving him with no tell to read.

He’d always found the Warden eerie. At least with Siren and the Angel of Death or even Blood God he could see the gleam in their eyes, the crinkle of their brows, the pulling of facial features behind their masks – small tells that gave away their humanity.

But with the Warden there’s just himself, reflected back, small and miserable where he sits, hoodie only just beginning to dry, defenseless and weak with the potion coursing through his veins.

There’s nothing left of the Red Chaos the world had known where he watches himself draw tight on himself.

The door closes shut behind Warden before the man steps into the room, lowering himself down on one knee to place the tray aside on the floor.

Tommy side-eyes the single bowl of mashed potatoes, his stomach curling uncomfortable, a reminder that it had been way too many fucking hours since he’d last eaten.

There’s a glass of water beside it, with a straw, and his mouth suddenly feels like cotton, his tongue darting out over the flaking blood on his dry lips.

“I’m going to feed you,” Warden says and Tommy twitches, scowling at him from the shadow of his hood. “We can do this the easy way or the hard way,” the Villain says, his voice unreadable and cold, distant and almost clinical in the way that hand raises to hover over his mask.

When Tommy makes no move to protest there’s a press and the seam in his mask splits open, his stomach curling at the sheer fucking *humiliation* of the Warden raising the glass to his mouth.

Stubborn. Prideful. Tommy had stood at the top of the world, side-by-side with the Number One Hero himself.

But he's not *stupid*.

He leans forward, fumbling for a moment to snag the straw, eyes closing shut as he sucked it down greedily, the coolness of the liquid a bliss against his parched throat.

He makes a noise of protest when it's taken from him, glaring weakly as the glass it put aside still half-full.

He curbs the urge to beg

Warden says nothing, scooping a spoonful of mash and offering it up, and Tommy feels the tips of his ears warm up as he reluctantly opens his mouth to clamp down on it, teeth scraping against the metal to make sure he got every damn scrap of it and-

Its... surprisingly good.

He can taste the butter and nutmeg, his stomach rumbling in appreciation, and he accepts the next spoonful with less reluctance, his eyes fluttering weakly even as he swallowed spoonful after spoonful, struggling to keep one eye on the Villain-

He turns his head half-way through, swallowing as he feels nausea climb up his throat.

The spoon hovers for a moment longer before getting dropped into the bowl with a *clink*.

The straw nudges against his mouth and he opens just enough to clamp down on it, managing only two more mouthfuls before giving up and it slowly slips out of unresisting lips, Warden's armour rustling as the glass was slowly placed aside.

Distantly he feels his mask resealing, flinching weakly as a hand pressed against his forehead.

"It shouldn't have this much effect on you," Warden mutters, a thumb dragging up Tommy's eyelid to study the blown pupil.

If you'd asked I'd have told you I lost a shit ton of blood already, Tommy thinks with a grumble as he turned away weakly, his stomach pleasantly full and thirst quenched. *Bad combo*.

He floats for a long moment and then jerks abruptly when his mouth is pried open, something new poured down his throat with a gurgle of startled protest, his stomach clenching tight, unappreciative of having anything more forced into, a whine torn with feet kicking out weakly, trying to wrench away-

But Warden holds him in place, closing his mask shut with a *click* and pressing up on his jaw, forcing his mouth shut and leaving him no choice but to swallow it all down, chain rustling as he jerked in protest, a hand dragging down his throat to encourage the swallowing and-

“You throw up and you’ll choke on your own vomit,” the Warden warns him as Tommy gags miserably, released only to fall sideways, world tilting around him as he fought to keep it down, feeling it creep up his throat before he forced it down with a shiver of disgust as he clenched his eyes closed.

“F-uck you,” he gasps, a mangled twist of words as he feels himself pale, panting open mouthed into his mask, his skin prickling with cold sweat as his stomach twisted.

Warden doesn’t deign to respond, armour rustling as he straightened up with the tray in hand and Tommy is left sweating and shivering, struggling to contain whatever the *fuck* had been forced down his throat as he presses his forehead miserably against the mattress, the door closing shut once again to leave him in darkness.

-

Tommy doesn’t know how long he’s left on his own inside that stupid fucking room but he feels a strange sort of numbness wiring through him that he struggles against, clawing and grasping for the fury that twists gnarled and dark inside of him and-

-

He grows to miss the silence.

-

There’s something methodical about the cruelty and violence, so different from what Tommy had known as a Hero as his fingers are snapped one after another, his ankles twisted with a sickening sort of wrenched *snap* of bones that doesn’t stop until he feels it break through his skin and-

“I don’t know shit!” Tommy snarls desperately, struggling against the hold on his arms as he feels his skin tear and bleed, bruises blossoming dark on his skin. “Please-“

-

He grows to miss being on his own.

-

He feels the snap and crunch of his ankle like a violent thing, a whine of fear lost in the panting desperate breaths before he’s yanked back with enough force that his mind blanks out in a numb sort of shock as both his shoulders dislocates with a wet noise that makes him gag.

“Tell me where Jester is,” Warden tells him, his voice calm and clinical as Tommy is hauled into a sitting position and slammed against the wall. “*Tell me* what Dream is planning.“

“I don’t fucking *know*-!” Tommy arches his back, kicking out, but Warden slams him right back, arms wrenching so badly that for a second, a single beat, it feels like his muscles has just been torn clean *off* and he can’t stop the horrible noise that claws its way up his throat.

His teeth snaps down tight as he he's released, left dangling as he struggles to desperately get his knees beneath him, to ease any of the burning pain from his arms-

Warden reaches out, grasping his hoodie, and yanking up just enough that he manages before he's abruptly released again.

He presses against the wall, trembling from the pain, blinking stinging eyes as Warden watches him silently.

"You will tell me," Warden says finally, straightening up. "In time."

"Fuck you," Tommy bites back bitterly through heaving breaths. "I don't know *shit*. All you're doing is wasting your time." A beat. "And mine," he tacks on resentfully.

Warden lingers for a moment, staring down at him.

"We'll see."

The door closing shut is a blessing and Tommy allows himself to sag against the wall, twisting towards it and pressing his forehead against the coldness of it.

-

The power dampener sits around his wrist like a rotten thing and he yanks futilely at the chain, twisting to press dig his sneakers into the wall and pull with enough force that he'll leave bruises in place, broken bone sending blinding pain up his arm that he doesn't care about as he pulls with a snarl of teeth-

"Giving up is the same as death."

"You've done enough."

-

Tommy thinks of Dream.

-

Red Chaos was the name the world had bestowed upon him, and Dream had laughed as he dragged Tommy down against his chest in a rough sprawl back against the couch, squeezing him tight after their first official mission together.

Tommy had done good and Dream had been proud.

He'd felt invincible, chest impossibly warm, cheeks red and eyes bright as Dream didn't let go, one arm remaining loosely wrapped around his shoulders to keep him there, his bright as he weaved together future plans.

"I'm going to be the Number One Hero, Tommy. I'm going to change this world and its broken system," Dream had whispered in his ear when he was nearly asleep, adrenaline

burning out from his system to leave him sleepy. *“And you’ll be right there at my side. We’ll be unstoppable.”*

-

“Liar!” Tommy snarls, slamming himself against the wall, tearing at ligaments and yanking at the chain around his wrist. “You fucking *liar*, *Dream*!”

-

He thinks of Wilbur.

-

“Want me to sing you a lullaby?” Wilbur teases, arms dipping around him before he tips back, dragging Tommy along with him in a soft sprawl. *“I think I can scramble up something child friendly.”*

“Oh fuck off,” Tommy snorts, wrestling with himself for only a moment before he shifts, squirming into a more comfortable position with a rough breath against Wilbur’s shoulder.

There’s silence for a moment and then a soft hum, mouth opening-

-

“Come on, Toms.” The arm around him gives him another squeeze before he’s released and a warm palm slides into his, fingers long where they fold into the web of his before Tommy can choke on the strange noise that had crawled up his throat. *“I’ve got you.”*

-

“I’m glad,” his friend tells him, drawing him closer and practically folding around him as Tommy burrows impossibly closer, fingers sinking deep into the sweater of the man, desperate to hold on for just a little bit longer-

-

A bit half-deliriously he wonders if Wilbur had bothered to water Clementine.

-

The Healer visits an hour after every session, a quiet wrap of fabrics, the Warden overlooking them both where he leans against the door.

“I’m almost done,” the Healer tells him quietly as he follows the Warden’s instructions on what to heal, his hand a gentle thing that Tommy shrinks away from as bones are shifted back in place, feeling the way they drag beneath his skin. “I’ve always- I’ve always been very good at healing bones.” It’s mindless chatter, Tommy’s eyes never veering away from the Warden’s tinted visor. “And- and it won’t leave any scars so- so there’s that.” A strained laugh. “A small comfort, I suppose.”

Tommy doesn't make any mention of the heel that burns inside his sneakers, pulsing wetly with pain that threads like needles up his leg as the door finally closes and he lets his eyes slide shut.

-

Wilbur drags a frustrated hand through his hair, pacing back and forth, the heat of the cell making his hair stick to his forehead as he halts, staring at the one-way mirror that gleams mockingly back at him, and he makes a deliberate turn of his heels and presses his palms flat against the obsidian walls.

The draining effect is immediate, his muscles rippling in response, a breath drawn and let out in frustration.

The blue is barely clinging onto his skin, just a tint desperately hanging on but slowly giving away to the paleness up his skin, the sides of his shoulder blades tingling uncomfortably.

"Chill out," Quackity calls from the cell next to him and Wilbur closes his eyes with a breath of frustration. "I can hear you pacing, man. You're not doing yourself any favours."

"Fuck off."

"Favour repaid and all that." His own words taunts him, mocks him, circling inside his mind until he wonders if he's going mad.

Out of all the people out there-

It had to be his Toms.

His lovely, bright, clever Tommy and-

It makes a horrible sort of sense. It all *fits*. In a most horrifying sort of realization and Wilbur feels like he's going to be sick all over again.

Red Chaos.

A thorn in his side.

A Hero steady and loyal at Dream's side.

He wasn't supposed to be a *child*.

Wasn't supposed to be the sixteen-year-old with shadowed eyes who glowered and bit with snappish words and who looked at him with a desperate sort of *want* that Wilbur didn't deserve but craved all the same.

And Wilbur-

"I'm going to vomit," he says out loud, dragging both palms through his hair as he stumbles back and sinks down on the bed.

“Siren-“ Nemesis words comes from the cell opposite his. “I know you’re upset but Jester is right.”

I don’t care, Wilbur gnashes his teeth to force back the vitriol of words that claws up his throat. *Tommy is out there, hurt, and I’m fucking stuck here-*

It had been a last ditch attempt, the realization of just *who* Red Chaos was settling like a stone in his chest, and it had halted his steps, because Tommy was *his*.

His to protect. His to love.

It had been so very easy to make the trade- offering himself up on the condition that Tommy was left where he was.

Dream had accepted it without hesitation.

It feels unfathomable, still, that the Hero who had sacrificed everything for him was none other than *Tommy* and it makes something jagged and possessive and *right* flood his heart.

His Tommy who laughed loud and boisterous in the snow and who sunk into his arms, burrowing against him with a shudder, so desperately reliant on someone that their disappearance had left him hollowed out and lost.

Wilbur had never been a man of faith but maybe it was meant to be. Their fates intertwined from that night and a chance meeting at a café where blue eyes had met his dully with a curling of lips to bare teeth.

Endearing. Clever. *Loyal*.

Touch-starved and desperately codependent because of **Dream**.

Wilbur’s slides his hands into the pockets of his coat before he lets his knuckles curl tense, all too aware of the camera angled towards the cells, watching him.

He hasn’t seen the Number One Hero since their confrontation but he just wants to have *words*.

Preferably after he’d broken some teeth. Maybe he’d oh so kindly pry a few of them out with pliers.

“I know you’re worried but you’re only wrapping yourself into knots.” Her voice is a cautious thing, beseeching for him to listen, and tension coils down his back.

He forces himself to relax his stiff shoulders.

Techno and Phil will come for him. It’s only a matter of time. And Tommy-

I’m coming for you, Wilbur promises with a clenching of his jaw as his head tips forward, breathing in the hot air. *Just wait for me, sunshine*.

I won't let anyone hurt you ever again.

-

Tommy flinches back, shrinking away from the hand that nears his face, glowering warily with a curling of his teeth behind his mask, a growl rumbling deep in his chest.

The Blood God pauses, watching him with eyes that gleam strangely in the dark cast of the room.

“Hello, Theseus.”

Chapter End Notes

If you saw any spelling mistakes, no you didn't. I'm on 21 hours of no sleep and I'm gonna go to sleep blissfully content and clean the last bits tomorrow.

On that note- hi, hello, cc! Wilbur Soot is on ao3 now, what a day.

Hush! Wilbur Soot is vibin in Pandora. It. Sometimes be like that.

:)

Tommy is. Coping. I think. It's. Maybe. Debatable.

Much love<3 I go crash now. Night night.

-

If you're interested there's a [Hush Now Discord](#) that tends to go *brrrr* with the theories in designated channels and also have a lot of fun chatter and chill people on top of scoops of chaos :)

You can find me on **tumblr** here: [corpse-art](#)

And I'm also on **twitter** now here: [corpsey_art](#)

I post a one hour countdown on all my social medias for a new chapter update if you're interested in such a thing :)

-

DUDES. We have new Hush Now art!! They're all amazing. Go and give them all so much love<3

(and if i ever miss linking your art- pls let me know!! i try to make sure i keep track of everything but i am but human)

[red chaos by kyubuie](#)

[FANART MASTERPOST](#)

Chapter 28

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Hello, Theseus.”

There’s something threading inside of him, fiendish and wretched as he curls the fingers of his left hand tight behind his back and glowers at the Villain.

He’s on his knees on the mattress, chain strained in his hunched position, his bones still aching from the recent healing he’d been put through and heel pulsing wetly with pain.

There’s a rank sort of mix of sweat and old blood clinging to him, bad enough that he can feel it through the filter in his mask.

The Blood God is down on one knee in front of him, slowly pulling his hand back, his red cape pooling heavily around him and crown golden jutting spikes where they span around the pink hair braided back.

Broad and tall, the picture of royalty, impeccably clean with that stupid boar mask on his face from where red eyes considers him.

Despite himself Tommy can’t help the embarrassment that curls inside of him, a horrible sort of thing that warms the tips of his ears.

“Blood God,” he bites back, eyes tracking the hand carefully as it was lowered down before flicking back to meet red. “Fancy seeing you here,” he mocks with a lick of his tongue against dry lips behind his mask.

His eyes darts behind the Villain, to Warden with the rustle of his heavy armour, curling tighter on himself as he flicks his gaze between them.

“Come to join the fun?” Tommy mocks, his breathing too hard, his body beyond exhausted, drained in a way that makes it hard to stay awake for more than an hour or two at a time.

He knows something is wrong, a deep unsettling thing after the third time he’d just straight up passed out during one of the sessions, and he has no idea how bad his heel truly is.

Blood God tilts his head, just an inch, with a low considering hum.

“I thought you said you’d been healing him.”

Warden straightens with a rustling noise that makes Tommy flinch back.

“I have.”

The Blood God’s eyes doesn’t veer from his.

“He smells of *rot*. ”

Tommy feels his face drain of colour.

“F-fuck you too,” he snaps with a harsh breath. “I know I haven’t showered in a few days-“

“That’s not it.” The Villain’s hand wraps around his ankle, faster than Tommy can react, and he winces as those long fingers clenches tight.

“Fucking-“ Tommy twists, his other sneaker pressing against the heel of the Villain who doesn’t as much as sway, unruffled and steady as he peels the sneaker on his foot off and discards it aside, the fabric of his pants rolled up as Tommy struggles futilely.

“Be still,” Blood God rumbles warningly and Tommy chokes as the sock is slowly pulled down, muscles locking tight, his spine curling with a miserable shiver as he hears the wet noise and he *gags*, the stench horrific.

“Well, that’s not a pretty sight,” Blood God drawls and Tommy would just *really* prefer not to look.

But his eyes are drawn all the same, toes twitching from the needle sharp pain prickling up and-

The wrap Nemesis had made for his heel is soaked through in a horrible mix of pus and dark blood that decidedly looks *not good*.

There’s parts where the bandages looks like they’ve sunken into his heel and he swallows the nausea that crawls up his throat like acid as the Blood God’s eyes meets his.

“I didn’t-“ Warden stumbles on the words, a breath sucked in and let out. “He didn’t mention it.”

“Of course he didn’t,” the Blood God rumbles. “It’s an easy way out.”

Tommy’s ankle is released and he draws it behind himself, baring his teeth behind his mask, but he’s ignored as Blood God straightens out to his full-height.

“Where is Lemon?”

“He’s gone home for the night.” Warden’s eyes are on him, Tommy can feel his neck itch. “Should I-“

“Don’t bother,” Blood God interrupts him. “Go call Angel here.”

“I’m handling it-“

“You’re not.” Blood God’s voice is an unforgiving thing, impassive as he turns his back to Tommy, leaving him to stare at the deep red of the fine cape. “It’s been *weeks* and you have no information to show for it. Just a former Hero trying to kill himself in your care.” The silence stretches between the two Villains. “You’ve been careless.”

From the darkness of his hoodie Tommy watches in fascination as Warden's shoulders ripple with tension before his head is slowly bowed down.

"I understand."

Blood God huffs a breath. "Go."

Warden turns his back, slowly, leaving the room with a click of the lock on the door sliding shut in place behind him, leaving Tommy alone with the Blood God.

"You're in luck," the Villain comments idly as he leans his shoulder against the wall. "We're not the sort to needlessly cripple someone if it can be helped."

Tommy gives him a disbelieving stare because-

He's fucking *seen* the Blood God rip the arm clean of an Enforcer.

Had watched the heavy axe he carried tear through flesh limbs and bone like they were nothing more than *butter* with eyes burning red on the battlefield, mouth spread in a wide grin of sheer and utter *exhilaration* with no care left in his path.

"You Heroes have always been a hardier sort," Blood God continues, apparently blind to the irony of his words.

And-

Yeah. Because that's what they were *made* to be.

A month before Tommy had officially stepped into the Hero scene as Red Chaos he'd been brought down to the lower floors of the tower, eyes darting over the sterile walls and the covered faces of the people working there as he was ushered over to a metal bed that he'd settled uncomfortably on before being urged to lie down.

He remembers the bright light above him, his mask, brand new, still an unfamiliar weight on his face.

He'd felt like a test subject, Sapnap beside him, offering whatever distraction he could with mindless chatter as his sleeve was rolled up and a needle slid through his skin with a gloved hand that had curled around his bicep to keep him still.

Increased cell regeneration and blood circulation along with an improved immune system and *whatever the fuck* was in his veins that were supposed to ensure effective oxygen intake as well as a base level toxin resistance and adrenaline enhancers.

Heroes were made to survive the situations they were put in and the commission made sure of it.

They were no use if a rusted nail was enough to take them out.

"*We're an investment,*" Dream had once commented when Tommy had grumbled about it and he hadn't been *wrong*.

Tommy blows a harsh breath, struggling against the exhaustion that tugs at his eyelids as the time stretches on, grumbling as he jerked at his shoulder to rub his eyes down roughly against it, the fear giving away to exhaustion.

"Why even bother?" he demands tiredly. "I keep telling Warden I don't know *shit* and I don't know how much fucking clearer I can be about it."

"Be as it may, you're still a key figure in this whole mess," Blood God rumbles, eyes closed, and head tipped down where he leans against the wall with his arms crossed. "Sometimes it's only a matter of asking the right questions."

Tommy grimaces behind his mask.

"Lovely," he grumbles sarcastically as he lets his eyes slip closed. "Wake me up whenever."

-

The next time he wakes up it's to fingers curling around his bicep and he flinches back, momentarily disorientated with a strange ringing in his ears as he struggles to reorientate himself-

There's a rustle of the chain behind him and Tommy chokes in surprise as he's hauled up, as easy as if he weighed fucking *nothing*, twisting with a knock of his forehead against a broad chest as the arms tightened around him.

"Stop struggling," Blood God huffs, bumping Tommy's head higher to rest on his shoulder as he carried him out through the open door with a brief ducking of his head before they entered a long stretching corridor. "We're meeting Angel and you're getting *clean* because I'm not spending another moment with your reek."

"Oh fuck you-" Tommy wheezes out in offence as he squints up at the jaw of the other, quite tired of being manhandled. "I'm sorry I'm offending your delicate orifices, I'll do my fucking best to not get locked up and tortured before our next meeting so I can spare them next time."

Red eyes drifts down to meet his. "You're mouthy when you're delirious."

Tommy clenches his jaw, turning his face further against the man's chest and closing his eyes in a demonstrative attempt to ignore him.

He knows that, the smart thing would be to pay attention to the path they're taking, to make some sort of mental map of the layout but-

He can't scramble the energy to try, his thoughts sluggish and cottony.

He hates how the warmth of the Villain bleeds into his tired cold body that's in a near constant state of shivering, whether from exhaustion or an effect of the weakness potion and whatever else the Warden had been forcing down his throat, he doesn't know.

There's a strange sort of numbness inside of him, and he knows he should be more afraid than he is, but there's a part of him that just wants to curl up and burrow down against the softness of the cloak that rubs against his skin with every step and sleep for half an eternity.

This is the same person who had laid on his couch, who had eaten the shitty instant made ramen and watched a documentary with him in the silence of his apartment.

It feels important, somehow, even if Blood God has no idea who he is behind his mask.

Can't know.

"Siren is important to me," the Blood God says after a long moment, his steps rhythmic and swaying, and Tommy cracks his eye open just a sliver. "He's family."

"And Dream is mine," Tommy mumbles a bit distantly, voice low and grumpy.

"Doesn't seem like much of a family," Blood God's voice lowers, a soothing thing that rumbles against his cheek. "Leaving you behind like that."

Tommy's chest twist.

"He's all I have."

He'd left Wilbur behind and he hates himself for it.

The Blood God says nothing to that, or if he does, Tommy is too out of it to hear it as he drifts off once again.

-

There's something incredibly off-putting about the way his brain feels like slush inside his head, his body not obeying him as he wants as he's dropped on a couch in a room that spans large around them, pressing down clumsily with his left foot to keep from tipping over.

He blinks several times with a miserable groan as his stomach lurches.

"Don't vomit," the Blood God huffs as he steps back, staring down at him with a displeasure. "I'm not cleaning it up."

"I'm-" Tommy swallows valiantly. "I'm starting to think you have issues, man."

"Unlike you who are the picture of health?" Blood God drawls, his boots firm against the floor and apparently unconcerned about any threat he'd make, back turned easily towards Tommy who clenches his jaw in frustration.

"I eat health for breakfast," Tommy informs him primly, wrinkling his itching nose at the feel of flaking blood. "How-" He licks his dry lips. "How long have I been here anyway?"

"And why should I tell you?" Blood God opens something that Tommy dubiously identifies as a fridge from the noise of it, his vision too blurry to make out any clear details.

“I don’t think a calendar is going to give anything away, big man.” He’s cold and he eyes the blanket folded on the couch arm. “Days have kinda been fading a bit in an out, you know- you know how it is.” He laughs and it comes out hollow and a bit empty where he sits.

“It’s been two weeks,” Blood God answers after a long moment of stretching silence as Tommy tips forward with an awkward curling of his body, pressing down with the upper part of his right foot to brace himself from tipping right over- “... What are you doing?”

Tommy struggles to trap the blanket between his shoulder and jaw, digging down stubbornly.

There’s a sigh.

“When I found out that Warden had you, this is not what I expected,” Blood God grumbles and Tommy flinches as the back of his hoodie is grasped and he’s tugged firmly back.

He opens his mouth to protest but Blood God grasps the blanket and throws it into his lap.

Tommy blinks down at it surprise, throwing a dubious look at the Villain from the shadow of his hood.

“You’re weak as a kitten,” Blood God huffs, turning his back. “It’s embarrassing to watch.”

Tommy lets himself sink back against the couch, wiggling to put more weight on his shoulders as opposed to his wrists.

“*You’re* embarrassing to watch.”

Blood God pauses.

“I’m going to be nice and overlook that since you’re drugged up to your ears.”

Tommy hums. “Thank you.”

“Sure,” Blood God says dryly.

Tommy jerks as a door opens up behind him, craning around as best as he can with hands trapped behind him, and he pales at the sight of the Angel of Death himself stepping through with a rustling of his dark wings, one hand on the top of the striped bucket hat on his head.

The Angel’s head tilts birdlike with something Tommy can’t quite place shimmering in the depths of his blue eyes as his hand lowers down.

“Warden has been feeding him potion of weakness continuously twice a day for two weeks,” Blood God rumbles as he approaches with a tray and Tommy shrinks back, eyes flicking between the two of them. “He’s also been digging into your stash for potions of harming.”

The Angel jerks his head up. “He’s been-“

“Yeah,” Blood God says wryly. “My reaction *exactly*. I’m surprised he’s still alive.” A pause. “His foot is also rotting.”

Tommy blanches. "Excuse me--"

"A bit hard to question a corpse," Angel hums, the tips of his fingers stained black where the sharp talon curls out and Tommy locks his gaze on them warily as they're raised to tap against the side of the mask on the Villain's face. "Has he said anything?"

Tommy twitches.

"I'm right *here*."

The Angel's wings flares out and Tommy flinches back at the sudden motion, voice cut off in a choked noise that gets trapped somewhere in the back of his throat, chest heaving as he swallows at the cool chill of blue eyes.

They linger for a long moment, Tommy's teeth sinking deep into the flesh of the inside of his cheek, breathing out when they finally left him.

"Blood God?"

"Nah," the Villain settles the tray down on the table in front of Tommy and he shifts uncomfortably, shrinking back at the close proximity with a shiver. "He's drugged to his ears, Angel."

"Could encourage a looser tongue." Angel steps into the room, steps quiet, eerily so. "But I suppose we should deal with his heel first."

"How quick to get the weakness and potion of harm out of his system?" Blood God wonders as he settles down heavily on the table beside the tray with Tommy realizes a bit belatedly contains food.

He stares at the mashed potato with something like resignation.

Angel tips his head contemplatively. "Two weeks is a long time. It's probably a good thing to ease him out with lower doses for a bit unless we want to send his system into shock."

Tommy hitches his shoulders up to his ears.

"We can get Lemon to look him over as well but with things like this it's better to take it slow. And the frequent healing will have already drained him out." Blue eyes drags over Tommy's body. "Hard to say what damage has been done."

"I don't know where Siren is." Tommy bunches his left fist tight behind his back. "I don't--"

"You're going to answer our questions in time," Angel cuts him off as he lowers himself down on one knee in front of him, sharp talon tipped fingers wrapping around his foot to prickle against the sole as it was lifted up and settled on the man's thigh.

Tommy tries very *very* hard not to stare, shoulders curling uncomfortably and skin itching from touch as talons are lifted, cutting nearly through the bandages.

“Get me some water, would you?”

“To soak in?”

The Angel of Death hums and Blood God breathes a sigh as he pushes himself up. “He’s more trouble than he’s worth, Angel.”

“He’s our only clue to getting to Siren.”

“And if he *doesn’t* know?” Blood God challenges. “He keeps insisting he doesn’t know anything.”

“I don’t,” Tommy says in a low breath, blinking at the strange sense of vertigo as he sways a bit.

Blood God gestures broadly towards him and Tommy sticks his tongue out, remembering belatedly that he’s wearing his mask and sinking back with a low grumble.

Angel’s talons prickles against his skin.

“He was the person who stood the closest to Dream.” Blue eyes finds his, shadowed from the brim of his hat. “It’s very likely he knows more than he thinks.”

Tommy’s neck prickles.

The bowl is brought back with cool water that licks against his heel as his foot is lowered into it and Tommy stares as the water stains.

“Nemesis picked the sneakers for me.”

Angel’s eyes flicks up and the Villain blinks at him.

“She was kind,” Tommy mumbles a bit distantly before his brow furrows. “Schlatt’s a *dickhead*.”

Blood God snorts in surprise. “Oh you’re *out* of it.”

“’m not,” Tommy grumbles. “Never- *never* been better.” His tongue wraps clumsily around the words and he snaps his teeth in irritation.

“Press X for doubt.” Blood God leans forward, meeting his gaze keenly. “There’s something I’ve been meaning to ask you.”

“Lots of questions lately,” Tommy frowns at him as the Angel starts peeling the bandages on his foot.

“Why did you save Siren that night?” Red eyes bores into his. “If you hadn’t, you wouldn’t be here.”

Tommy gives his tired body a shake.

“We don’t kill.” He grimaces. “Dream- Dream taught me that.”

“And you listen to what Dream tells you to do.”

Tommy blinks at him, nodding a bit absently as his gaze drifts down to his heel.

His stomach twists on itself and he jerks his head aside with nausea crawling up his throat.

“So what’s the thing with you and Dream?” It’s a distraction from the horrid mess of his heel and Tommy latches onto it. “You two seem close.”

“He saved me.” Tommy’s fingers curls. “I owe him everything.”

“I see.” Blood God’s eyes doesn’t veer from his and it makes Tommy’s neck prickle.

“So when did you meet him?” Somewhat distantly Tommy knows that there’s questions he doesn’t want to answer but it’s hard to focus with the heaviness of his thoughts and the smell of rot, all too aware of the Angel of Death’s touch and the burning pain of his heel.

“I’m-“ Tommy blinks heavily. “Eight- eight years ago?” It sounds right. Maybe.

“That would mean he was thirteen when you met him.” Blood God’s head tilts a fraction. “Must have been something quite impressive he did to earn your loyalty.”

“He saved me,” Tommy repeats a bit desperately.

“How?”

“He-“ Tommy’s face twists, muscles bunching as he feels his heel *getting fucking squeezed*.

“He saved-“ He chokes out, a whine trapped somewhere in his throat. “He *saved* me, he- he’s good.”

“Sounds to me like something went wrong down the line.”

Tommy laughs wetly. “You’re- you’re telling *me*.” He blinks his blurry gaze. “He- yeah, something went to shit.”

“And now you’re trying to figure out what.”

Tommy swallows a bit desperately.

“What’s- what’s it to you?”

“Siren is missing, taken along with Nemesis and Jester.”

“I know- I know *that*.” His brow furrows, struggling through the sludge of his thoughts.

“You- you haven’t found them.” It tastes like a strange revelation. “Schlatt-“

“Nothing.” Blood God leans closer, his boar mask a strangely terrifying thing with the fluctuation of his mind. “Normally when a Villain is captured it’s big news, media circulating information on it.” Tommy’s shoulders wires tight. “But instead there’s a manhunt out for any

and all information on the Syndicate and on top of that, Enforcers and Heroes alike are stepping into territory they have no business being in.”

“The- Pit,” His voice chokes on the word with a jerk of his foot, a hand tightening warningly around his ankle and it *fucking hurts*. “I thought- I thought the entrance was *hidden*.”

“It is,” Blood God says and Tommy shakes his head a bit desperately as his eyelids pulls heavily downwards, groaning in frustration with the pounding of a creeping headache.

“Dream is leading it,” the Villain presses and Tommy flinches when he feels a hand curling around his bicep, dragging him closer, so close that all he can see is *redredred*. “If Dream is as good as you claim him to be that means Schlatt is up to something.”

“Ob-viously,” Tommy spits out. “He’s- he’s a rotten bastard.”

”So what is it that he has on Dream?” Blood God presses with a tightening of fingers and Tommy stares into the eyes of the predator above him. “What is he *hiding*?”

And-

It’s-

The brand on the back of Dream’s neck.

A thirteen-year-old who lives on his own when he shouldn’t.

“Civilians live vastly different lives from us.”

“We’re little more than entertainment and headlines.”

“We’re an investment.”

“... Perhaps I’m the most selfish of them all.”

The Hero commission has a hold of Dream from his childhood steps, a heavy burden of expectations, of creation of what he becomes.

“I don’t fucking know.” The words are wretched in the way they claw out his throat. *“Of course* he has secrets! Dream has always had *secrets* but I don’t know what the hell Schlatt’s fucking got on him!” He meets the Blood God’s eyes with wild desperation, chest heaving. “I’m the wrong fucking person to ask!”

The Villain regards him with unreadable eyes as Tommy swallows thickly, heart heavy and skin cold.

“Then would you help if you could?” Tommy jerks his head towards the Angel of Death who lifts a hand to block the sight of his heel with a contemplative tilt of his head. “How much are you willing to give if it means getting Dream out of Schlatt’s hands?”

And.

It's so *easy*. Despite everything.

It *has to be* because Tommy has already left the only person that matters, other than Dream, behind.

"Everything," Tommy heaves out. "I'm willing to give *everything*."

-

Tommy lies in the bathtub, the water warm around him, high enough that it's covering his mouth, head tilted back and eyes focused dully on the ceiling above him.

His newly wrapped heel is set on the side of the tub and his right hand is a bruised broken mess that he lifts up to stare at- the fingers blotched strange in colour from lack of circulation, the power dampener a wrap of silver over thick scar tissue.

There's a strange sense of desolation inside of him, a rotten kind of feeling that curls around his heart.

He blows a breath of bubbles that pops against the surface.

"I don't have the whole day," Blood God grunts where he stands outside the door left open just an inch, back turned. "And I don't trust yourself not to drown yourself in there." Lower. "Whether by accident or will."

Tommy blinks heavy eyelids and paws a hand out for his mask, dumping it into the water with a half-hearted scrub, old dried blood swirling into the surface.

He slips it over his mouth with a low *click* as it sealed against his skin.

"You should get one of those- those yellow rubber ducks." His body aches and there's bruises spanning up his legs where bones had been broken and healed, his chest a mess where Warden's frustration had left its pattern in flowers of healing sickly yellow and blue.

He's not particularly interested in finding out what his back looks like.

"A rubber duck," the Blood God repeats in a disbelieving voice. "Sure. I'll make a note of it."

"You should." Tommy groans tiredly and slips down, his entire head momentarily ducked beneath the surface before he jerks himself up, water dripping from the mess of his hair as he struggles himself into a sitting position with a heaving breath. "Fucking-" He winces, right arm drawing across his chest and heel disappearing into the water with a *plop*.

He stares down at it.

"Ah."

"What did you do?" Resignation.

“Did the Angel tell me to not get my heel wet?” Tommy wonders a bit absently as he gives it a poke, foot jerking from a pulse of pain, and he frowns down at it.

“... He did.”

“Alright.” Tommy hums, fumbling to grab the scentless soap and twisting it over his head one-handed and squeezing out a generous dollop.

He drops it uncaringly into the water.

“... You got your heel wet, didn’t you?”

“It’s swimming,” Tommy informs him as he scrubs the shampoo into his hair, the motion awkward, arm sockets still aching from where they’d been dislocated more than once and sending a prickling needle like pain with every back and forth motion.

He gives up quickly and ducks his head down, shaking his head beneath the surface, tugging his fingers half-heartedly through the knotted tangle.

“I can’t believe I’ve been put on babysitting duty for a Hero who is practically high as balls,” the Blood God grumbles.

“I don’t like drugs.” He yawns, mouth opening wide with an ache of tired muscles. “No numbing.”

“No numbing,” Blood God repeats skeptically.

“Dream hates numbing,” Tommy informs him, eyes drooping. “I’m too *cool* for them.”

Blood God makes a noise Tommy can’t be bothered to interpret as he stretches out to grab for the towel left folded on the toiled, getting the edge of it and yanking it towards him.

He rubs it over his head and lowers it down with a huffed breath.

Pauses.

“Ah.” He stares at the rest of the towel submerged in the water. “The towel is swimming too.”

“Oh for-“

-

There’s a hoodie waiting for him on the bed, red, plain, nothing on it, the fabric different from the one Dream preferred.

He pulls it over the black t-shirt anyway, spending a moment to wrestle his limp right wrist down the sleeve, the fabric clinging impatiently to his skin.

He touches the feather around his neck before slipping it carefully beneath his t-shirt, skin prickling because-

It's a stupid thing to cling to.

A night beside the Angel of Death, taught how to cook fried rice, a red warm jacket left in the way with a single feather.

Humanity.

"Siren is important to me."

"He's family."

It's surprising, and yet not.

And perhaps there's understanding in it all.

Tommy would do anything for Dream.

Blood God would do anything for Siren.

He supposes they aren't so different in that way and it's a realization that settles strange inside of him, where he stands, in a simple non-descript room with a single bed with an uncomfortable looking chair beside it, in clothes that aren't his.

He drags the beanie over his head, making sure his hair is all covered, and drags the hood up to shadow his face.

The sweatpants are soft, black, just a bit too long, and he foregoes the socks in favour of limping his way to the door Blood God was waiting outside with a grimace of pain behind his mask as he dragged the door shut.

The Villain meets his gaze with a tilt of his head from where he's leaning against the wall.

"You don't reek."

"You're still ugly."

They stare at each other.

"Mouthy," Blood God grunts, pushing away to straighten up to his full height, easily towering over him, the royal red mantle swishing at the heels of his ankles, broadening the shape of his shoulders.

There were some who speculated that he was a full piglin hybrid with the pink of his skin and the edge of his ears that stretches up beside the golden of his crown but Tommy personally doubts it. Close, perhaps. But the way his feet press down against the floor is too silent, too human.

Hooves would have made more noise.

“C’mon,” the Villain grunts, turning his back towards him, as if any threat he made had been reduced to nothing.

With a curling of guilt he thinks of Techno with the pretty lines of his face, eyes watchful, the strands of his pink hair falling to delicately frame his face.

“I don’t want to hurt, Wilbur.”

“That doesn’t mean you won’t.”

He pushes the memory away with a shake of his head as he limps behind the Villain, wincing with every other step, his breath quickly growing into a wheeze and he stumbles, his palm pressing flat against the wall with a prickling of sweat on his brow.

He squeezes his eyes shut in frustration.

“You’re still heavily influenced by both the potion of weakness and harm,” Blood God rumbles, too close, and Tommy forces his eyes open, craning his head to meet the crimson gaze of the Villain regarding him.

“And whose fault is that?” Tommy growls in frustration.

“Not mine.” Blood God leans closer, so close that Tommy’s shoulders curls tight, forcing himself not to shrink back. “I don’t trust you.”

“Yeah, well, the feeling is mutual,” Tommy snaps back. “You- you’re not the one who looks like they’ve been through a fucking grinder.”

Something like dark amusement gleams in those red eyes as he eases back.

“Your wrist is broken.”

“Your arm is broken.”

Tommy twitches.

“Thank you for noticing,” he grumbles, pushing off the wall with a hiss and a wobble.

“We’ve called Lemon in. He’ll look at your heel. But you’ll have to deal with the bruises and broken wrist for a while longer.”

It’s not terribly surprising. Tommy’s aware that he’s lost weight, his body forced to work overtime with the push of Lemon’s powers forcing his bones in place, and with the potions still running through his system it would be dumb to reroute whatever resources his body had left to deal with it.

“Lovely,” Tommy’s world tips with dizziness and he stumbles, and a hand wraps around his bicep to haul him up, holding him easily as he choked, struggling to reorientate himself-

There's a low resigned sigh.

Tommy snarls as he his legs disappear from under him, twisting in shock as he was hauled up into Blood God's arms, the sheer fucking *warmth* of him impossible to ignore where he presses against the Villain.

The hybrid doesn't spare him a glance, Tommy's heart slowly eases from the desperate thumping from the shot of adrenaline.

"Let me down."

"When you're less of a mess," Blood God grumbles. "I have places to be and you're useless like this."

The truth of it *burns*.

-

He wants to say he's not surprised when the metal wraps around his wrists hours later, locking them together behind his back.

But his stomach is full, he's clean, sleepy in a way that beckons soft, and he opens his mouth and accepts the diluted potion the Angel presses against his lips through the split seam of his mask even as his instincts screams in protest.

"It's not a perfect solution," the Villain hums as Tommy reluctantly swallows it down, grimacing as a finger pushed beneath his mask to seal it back shut with a *click*. "But it's the only one I have for now."

The weakness rankles at him where he sits, legs in a crisscross on a bed that is invitingly soft, eyes already tugging heavily with a curl of nausea and sluggish tug of his thoughts.

A palm settles against the side of his face, angling his face up to the eerie glow of those blue eyes and he meets them with a hazy gaze.

"We'll talk more when you're in a state to do so," the Villain murmurs contemplatively, thumb dragging thoughtfully over the edge of his mask, just beneath his eye, talon sliding over his skin without drawing blood.

Tommy can't help the way he presses against into the touch, a shiver running though his body, and there's a tug of the lines of the Angel's face that gives away the smile behind his mask.

"We'll find a use for you yet, little sparrow."

So, how we feeling?

I've been on a bit of a roll lately, hope you guys haven't tired of me yet, lmao. Possessed by the Ghost of Writing. Apparently.

It's Sunday and I'm pleasantly sleepy from a good day of writing. Hope you're all having a good one wherever you are when you're reading this<3

-

If you're interested there's a [Hush Now Discord](#) that tends to go *brrrrr* with the theories in designated channels and also have a lot of fun chatter and chill people on top of scoops of chaos with my lovely mods<3

You can find me on **tumblr** here: [corpse-art](#)
And I'm also on **twitter** now here: [corpsey_art](#)

I post a one hour countdown on all my social medias for a new chapter update if you're interested in such a thing :)

-

DUDES. We have new Hush Now art!! They're all amazing. Go and give them all so much love<3

(and if i ever miss linking your art- pls let me know!! i try to make sure i keep track of everything but i am but human)

[Crossing the Line by_syrren](#) animatic

[Lives Crashing by m0ssystars](#) art

[A Wall of Love by PlantChecker](#) art

[FANART MASTERPOST](#)

Chapter 29

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy wakes with an exhausted groan, prying his eyes open as he twists awkwardly with a small jerk of his body to roll himself over to his back, arms pressing flat against the soft mattress beneath him.

There's a cover tugged up on his body and he pinches it beneath his toes, tugging and kicking half-heartedly to get it off him before he twists to hook his leg over the side of the bed to drag himself towards it.

His stomach muscles aches in protest as he pulls himself up, feeling rumpled and vaguely nauseous as he slumps forward with a curling of his shoulders and clenching of his jaw behind his mask.

He gives himself a tired shake in a fruitless attempt to get some life into himself as he peers around the room.

Blue walls, a ridiculously soft choice for a hide-out of Villains, the bed of better quality than the one he kept at home.

Tommy supposes that a life of villainy pays well if this was the kind of room offered to their *guests*.

The bathroom door is left ajar and the door leading out to the corridor firmly shut and heavily locked and he stumbles up to his feet, sucking a breath at the cold press of the floor against his bare feet, bracing his right foot on the balls of his feet as he limped his way towards it.

"Hey-" He slams his shoulders weakly against it, letting his weight slump fully towards it with a deft knock of his head. "I'm awake-"

"Step back."

Tommy grumbles but drags his body off the door and to the wall, a shiver running through him, and he rubs his shoulder against the bottom of his jaw as he listens to the beep and click of the locks before the handle was turned and the door dragged open.

Blood God angles his head to peer down at him.

"You weren't supposed to be awake for another few hours yet," the Villain remarks at the sight of his ruffled appearance.

"Yeah, well- I am," Tommy huffs tiredly, twisting to wiggle the fingers of his left hand. "Mind unlocking this so I can take a piss?"

"You promise to behave?" the Blood God rumbles with mockery that's old.

“I’ll even give you a pretty paw if you *hurry the fuck up*.”

Tommy’s shoulders locks tight when fingers curls around his arm but there’s a twist of metal and he feels the instant relief as he carefully pulls arms in front of him, limbs protesting after being forced into the same position for so long.

He breathes out carefully.

“Thank you,” he mutters as he pushes off the wall, limping around the Villain with a hurried beeline towards the bathroom where he wastes no time dragging the door shut.

There’s no lock but he doesn’t give a fuck as he fumbles his pants open with one hand.

-

He spares a glance at his appearance in the mirror when he’s washing his hands, frowning at the bags beneath his eyes, the tight lines in his face, a bruise dark at his temple.

Tugs at the beanie to drag it lower, dark red in colour as opposed to the black he usually favoured.

His wonders if he imagines the dullness of his eyes, the colour strangely flat, as if life itself had bled out of them.

It’s a ridiculous thought.

-

Tommy makes a valiant effort at making his way down the hallway on his own two feet but not even a third of way he finds his feet swept from beneath him and he growls at the piglin with a snap of his teeth as he twists in frustration at the manhandling.

Freezes when the Villain rumbles warning at him with glow of red eyes angled to peer at him through the pink mask.

“Do not mistake my patience for kindness, *Theseus*.” Blood God’s voice makes him shrink back in the firm hold that tightens around him. “The only reason you still live is because we need you to get Siren.”

“Anyone ever tell you you’re shit at making friends?” Tommy forces out even as a tremble runs through him, all too aware that the Villain must feel it, swaying unwillingly with the easy steps of the man carrying him. “Because you are, in fact, crap at it.”

“As opposed to, what, *you*?”

“I have a friend,” Tommy responds automatically and his heart twists at the thought of Wilbur. “Had,” he tacks on unsurely with a blink of his eyes.

“And did he leave you as well?”

Tommy chokes on a horrible noise. “Low blow,” he wheezes out. “*Ow.*”

-

“You know, everything would be much easier if you’d just *not* tie me up like this.” Tommy twists to tip himself face down on the couch with a *flump*, stretching his legs out and feet up on the armrest.

It’s the same room as yesterday, though Tommy is able to make out much more of the details where he lies with his cheek half-mushed against the couch.

It looks vaguely bunkerish if he’s being honest. Atrocious style choice.

The room in itself is large with four large couches set around a round table where he’s currently sprawled out and then to his right, a good bit away, the Blood God stands in a very bare bones kitchen that looks like it belonged some years in the past with a rather barf green shade to the fridge the Villain is rummaging through.

The walls aren’t painted, but rather concrete, which- yeah, they’re most likely far below shit with the chill clinging to the air.

He huffs a breath against the leather couch, squirming his shoulders in a fruitless attempt to get into a more comfortable position, head half-way up the armrest where he digs his chin in to heave himself halfway up and narrow his eyes at the Villain.

“You said Lemon was on his way?”

“Oh, so *now* you’re concerned about your heel?” Blood God calls back as he pulls something out of the fridge.

Tommy eyes it warily.

“Maybe.” He lets his body slump forward. “That’s not mashed potato, is it?”

“They’re a good source of fiber *and* they’re full of antioxidants that helps your body function properly.” The Villain’s eyes meets his. “Things you need.”

“There’s plenty of other foods that does that too,” Tommy complains grumpily. “Like *broccoli*. Have you heard about broccoli? Because let me tell you-“

“Will you shut up if I give you some vegetables with it?”

Tommy’s mouth snaps shut and he considers.

“Got any fish as well?”

“This is not a *hotel*.”

“That’s not a *no*.” He perks up. “Listen, a varied food cost-“

Blood God closes the fridge shut and Tommy shrinks back, eyeing him warily.

“I don’t have any broccoli.”

“Okay.”

The Blood God regards him where he lies, chin propped up on the armrest and wrists clasped in metal on his back, hood pulled low to shadow his face.

“There *is* some bell peppers,” he says slowly.

Tommy blinks at him.

“Bell peppers are nice,” he says cautiously.

Blood God blows a harsh breath.

“This is just because it’s another hour until Lemon is here.”

“Okay.”

“I’m not cooking for you again.”

“That’s fine.”

A grunt of acknowledgement and Blood God opened the fridge back up, bending down to pull out bell peppers in orange and red and Tommy shuffles to his side, resting his chin so he can watch the Villain work.

It doesn’t take long before he’s half-dosing to the sound of clinking tools and the sizzle of the fish in the skillet.

-

His hands gets freed for eating and he sits with his right hand in his lap, cautiously sleeving the mix of mashed potato, fish and bell peppers into his mouth with his left.

It’s nice.

“Thank you,” he says.

The Blood God offers nothing in return where he sits on the couch across him, right foot on his left knee, a book cradled in an open palm.

Tommy reaches for the tall glass of water and snags the straw, drinking with a drooping of his eyes.

“Don’t choke,” the Villain says with a flick of his eyes.

Tommy finishes the last of the water with obnoxious slurping.

Blood God snorts, focusing back on his book.

-

Tommy is half-napping when Angel and Lemon finally makes an appearance, turned around with his cheek mashed against the back cushions of the couch.

He wakes with a startled jerk as the door closes shut.

“About time.” Blood God snaps his book shut. “You were supposed to be here two hours ago.”

Tommy licks awkwardly at his lips, quietly thankful no one in the room can see the drool clinging to his chin as he turns towards the two new Villains with a narrowing of his eyes.

Lemon is wearing a simple black zip hoodie and a yellow helmet with a little green plant with two leaves on the very top of it, his visor tinted dark, a change from the swaddle of clothes Tommy had seen him with when he visited after Warden’s sessions.

His heart pounds inside his chest, a shiver running through him as he shrinks down cautiously, hackles rising with a baring of his teeth.

Lemon freezes where he stands, the sleeve of his left arm knotted tight and-

Tommy stares at him, something slowly slotting together in his mind because-

Warden had killed the Healer that helped Dream-

An arm the only thing left behind in the pool of blood.

“Ponk?” he asks disbelievingly.

The Healer jerks, taking a step back as both Angel and Blood God zeroes their gazes on him, but Tommy ignores them both as he gapes.

“You- it’s fucking- you’re *alive*?”

“I’m not-“ the Healer stutters, waving his hand.

“I’m not stupid,” Tommy cuts him off, displeasure wiring through him, warring against the curiosity that flares strong beside the pounding of adrenaline. “I *met* you. When you were healing Dream. I remember- because you- two weeks later you were *dead*.” He blinks, sinking his chin into the couch cushion. “Only, you’re not, huh.” Something dull. “You’re alive and working with the Syndicate.”

“It’s a contract.” Ponk reaches up, fumbling a bit awkwardly before pushing the helmet off, revealing the mask of yellow, red and black that Tommy had seen in that hospital room, covering everything but his eyes. “I’m- it’s a contract,” he repeats with a twisting of his voice.

Tommy sinks his chin deeper, stomach knotting.

“A contract,” he repeats, swallowing.

Because Tommy knows the fate of the Healers, locked up in the name of *safety*.

Children taken young.

“I see,” he says a bit emptily.

“Well, I’m glad we’re all familiar with each other,” the Blood God drawls, taking a step towards Tommy who moulds himself against the couch cushions. “Outside *obvious* reasons.”

Tommy twitches.

“You said-“ Ponk’s dark eyes flicks to his for just a moment before focusing on the Blood God. “You said he’d been hiding an injury.”

“His heel is in a bad shape,” the Angel hums as he steps past the Healer with a rustle of his wings. “I drained it out but the rot had already taken root.”

Ponk’s eyes knits together and there’s a *shift* in his body language, all business as he takes the case the Angel holds up and approaches Tommy who has the Blood God looming above him, daring him to try anything.

There’s a part of Tommy takes pleasure in it. In knowing that, even like this, there’s still caution.

The potions of harm and weakness is still heavy in his system and the power suppressor sits tight around his wrist but Red Chaos hadn’t earned his reputation for *nothing*.

There’s a part of Tommy that resents it, knowing that the wrong move could draw all the wrong questions.

The potions, for all that he hates it, is an excuse for why he hasn’t used his powers, as much as the muddling of his thoughts are a dangerous thing.

“How bad?”

Tommy reluctantly shifts his knees so his bare feet are hanging off the edge of the couch pillows, fully aware that there’s little use in any protest he wants to make with his wrists locked tight against his back.

“You tell me,” the Angel hums as he takes a seat on the armrest to the right of Tommy who clenches his teeth, shoulders curling tight as he watches the Villain from the corner of his eye.

A loose robe like jacket in green and black, jewellery on his fingers, bound to bands of gold, one wing so close to him that, if his hands were freed, he’d be able to reach out and touch them- to run his fingers through them.

It's an itch of curiosity and a dangerous desire.

The feather is soft against his skin where it hangs around his neck and he clings to that as he feels the bandages on his foot gently being peeled off by Ponk's steady hand, back stiff and trembles running through him because-

It's a touch associated with pain, with the sliding of bones beneath his skin, and sweat beads on his brow, fingers clenched tight on his back as he presses his forehead down against the couch pillow, a noise choked down and his breath rasps harshly.

"Tell me where-"

"Jester-"

"Siren-"

A palm spans over his neck, pressing down over the fabric of his hood, radiating heat that sinks into the cold of his skin as he flinches, a whine crawling up his throat-

"Breathe, Theseus" a voice rumbles into his ear, too close, and he sucks in a desperate breath through his mask. "Again." There's an exaggerated sound of air being sucked down, let out, the palm never moving as he struggles to follow the command, eyes squeezed shut and brow pressed tight against the couch cushions as he trembles.

"I didn't think-" A voice climbing high-

"He's good at putting up a façade," the Angel comments from his right as Tommy gags on a breath, coughing, his heart pounding too fast in his chest as he heaves breath after terrible breath.

Dangerdangerdanger his instincts pounds with it even as he claws for sense and rational with the palm that squeezes against his neck, a thumb dragging up the tense stretch of muscles before pressing down just at the base of his skull, the sensation distracting enough that his breath stutters and-

A low noise of *sorry-sorry-sorry* leaves his mouth in the muddled mess of his mind, a noise distinctively inhuman.

The hand on his neck tightens, the thumb switching back to rubbing up and down his neck as he shivers.

"There's nothing on his files about being a hybrid."

"He doesn't have any visible tells." There's a rustle and Tommy finds himself coaxed up with palms that spans on either side of his face, dragging his gaze up to *blueblueblue* with a breath that stutters in his throat as he presses desperately into the offered comfort, blinking in a vain attempt to clear his blurry vision. "Adrenaline and potions are a bad mix," the man in front of him comments, head tipping. "Could be a distant thing."

A grunt from behind him.

A thumb presses beneath his beanie, tracing over the roundness of his ear before dragging down and there's a *click*.

A panicky noise claws up his throat as he feels his mouth being pried open, trying to draw back, but the palm on his neck squeezes tight to hold him in place.

"Angel." A drawl of dark amusement. "I thought you were trying to make *friends*."

"He's not going to remember it anyway." Idle commentary as a thumb presses down against his molars, something sharp prickling inside his mouth- "Definitively some sort of hybrid."

The fingers disappear from his mouth and Tommy snaps his teeth shut, clenching them tight, trembling as a click signified his mask once against closing shut, a soft patronizing coo making him jerk as fingers were wiped off on his hoodie.

"Should make getting the potion out of his system a bit easier."

"I'm not-" Tommy gasps. "I'm not a hybrid."

His heart pounds too hard inside his chest as he tries to shrink away, nowhere to go with the palm still spanning his neck, feathers rustling distractedly at the edge of his vision-

He gags, coughing and wheezing from the panic wiring too tight inside of him, squeezing the air out of his lungs-

"I was trying to calm him down," a sigh, as if he was nothing more than an inconvenience and-

Tommy's vision blurs and he draws shuddering desperate breaths, open mouthed inside his mask.

"I'm sorry-"

Everything blurs together, memories and reality, green blurring with the bright neon of his mentor's hoodie.

"I'm-" He chokes on the words, a keen crawling up his throat-

A low rumbling sigh and then the hand on his neck was gone before an arm looped around his chest, pulling him in and pressing his back and arms tight against something overwhelmingly *warm*, a breath drawn with exaggeration as he twists, struggling to get away with a blind kind of panic wiring through him, his vision dancing with black spots-

"He's going to faint."

"Come on, Theseus," a voice encourages into his ear. "You're more than this."

And Tommy-

Tommy tips his head back, heels digging down to arch his spine in a desperate attempt to free his airways as he draws a shuddering choked gasp of a breath of desperate *air*.

Another one as he slowly slumps back into a waiting hold with trembling limbs and hitched shuddering breaths.

“There we go,” the voice rumbles approvingly as he blinks his spotty vision, barely aware of anything but the heat against his back and the arm that spans over his chest. “*Good dog.*”

“Blood God.” Amusement.

“Don’t you *Blood God* me when I’m fixing your mess, Angel.” Tommy’s head rolls, tipping with the body as the man eases back, his ear pressing against a warm chest with a distant wet *thu-thump thu-thump*. “Why were you late anyway?”

“I don’t want to interrupt but his heel-“

A huff, his leg nudged, Tommy too out of it to barely register the touch that settles hesitantly on his foot with a gentle squeeze.

“There’s an announcement scheduled for tomorrow- a big thing apparently.” There’s a pause. “We can’t afford to leave Siren there longer than we have, something is happening. We have to move the meeting for tomorrow.”

“You just sent the main attraction into a panic attack.” Something wry. “You’re expecting him to answer anything when he’s like this?”

“If we time it right we should have him in decent shape.” A rustle of wings. “The adrenaline burst will knock him out for a good few hours and help the potions run through his system, we just have to time the meeting for when he wakes up.”

“You said it was dangerous to quit him cold turkey.”

“It’s for Siren.” A beat. “He’s a hybrid, however distantly, we always handle potions better than humans. Even if it’s a miniscule thing- it’s still going to increase his odds.”

A low rumbling hum against his ear.

“I need him alive, Angel.” A lowering of the voice. “At least for now.”

“I don’t see a way around it.” A sigh. “We can’t afford the weeks it would take to get him into shape. Warden fucked up and now we’re stuck with him like this.” The knuckles of a hand nudges at his face, a thumb prying his eye open, and Tommy’s gaze is a blurry haze of blue for a long moment before it was allowed to shut again. “He’ll be disorientated and he’s already in an odd state of half-dissociation. We can use it to our advantage and dose him up after.”

“He’s going to be furious when he gets out of it,” a snort. “Good luck trying to make him play nice.”

“He’s desperate to get to Dream.” A breath. “His power is useful. If we can get him to cooperate-“

A rumbling laugh. “Can you imagine? Dream, to see his loyal little dog at our command- what a *lovely* image.”

There’s a stretch of silence.

“Angel-“

“He’s clever but he lacks direction.” There’s a musing quality to the voice. “You’ve seen him. It’s ingrained into what he is.”

“A Hero.”

“A *follower*.”

“*Hero*, Angel. I wasn’t serious, don’t you try. He’s ruthlessly loyal to Dream.” A beat. “He’d die for him. He’s not going to abandon that.”

“He doesn’t have to.” The voice is thoughtful and Tommy groans weakly with a twitch of his leg as something twists inside his heel, squirming until a hand settles against his neck, squeezing down to still him with a weak quivering hitch of his breath before he slumps boneless against them. “We can use his loyalty against him.”

A hush.

“He saved Siren’s life.” It’s a quiet thing, a deep breath of the chest he rests on.

“He’s the reason Siren is missing.”

“Heroes are all the same, I don’t care if you want to use him, but a life for a life, Angel. He’s staying alive until we’ve got this all figured out.” A pause. “Unless he gives us a reason to kill him.”

“... We could risk a small dose. Just enough to assure his system doesn’t send him into a seizure.”

“A *seizure*-”

“There’s a reason I keep the potions out of human hands, Blood God.”

The silence stretches and Tommy drifts.

“How’s his heel looking?”

“The only reason he’s not dead is because of the boosters given to Heroes.” His toes curl as a finger drags down the middle of his foot. “I can heal it over but he doesn’t have much of a reserve to draw from. Warden-“ A hitch. “Warden made sure of it. He’s been continuously healed for two weeks- he’s drained and it’s a miracle he’s even standing at all.”

“Stubbornness.”

“You admire it.” Fond amusement.

“*Heh!?* I do *not*-“

Words muddling as Tommy sinks deeper and deeper into the vestiges of his mind.

“Anything else you can do, Lemon?”

“I’ve drawn most of the infection out of him and regrown the dead skin.” Very, very distantly he feels a thumb stroke down the back of his neck. “It’s not perfect but-“

He falls.

-

Tommy dreams of Wilbur.

Of the endless stretch of Pogtopia, of the joy in the freedom of the world that opens up entirely for him.

Of snow and the ice that he brushes away to peer through the ice that shimmers beneath the sun.

He dreams of the echoing meld of their voices.

OUR POGTOPIA. The rush. The adrenaline.

The sense of belonging.

He dreams of soft hands in his hair and a room of life where there had only been bare emptiness and a story read through him on a disc.

-

“*I never told him,*” Tommy admit with an ugly twist of his lips. “*I wish I had because maybe- maybe it would have changed something, you know?*” He twists his hand hard in his jeans. “*But I didn’t and I don’t know why.*”

“*Maybe,*” Wilbur says softly, “*you were waiting for him to say it first.*”

-

Tommy wakes briefly, feeling himself put down, a cover rustling to be pulled over him as he twists, kicking down blindly against it.

“You should be asleep,” a voice huffs him as the room spins dizzily around him. “You’ve got a busy day tomorrow.”

“Wha-“ His voice rasps painfully as he struggles to reorientate himself, failing miserably. “’rsty,” he complains.

A low sigh.

“Fine. But this stays between the two of us.”

Tommy groans as his limp body is pulled up, head tipping limply back against a firm shoulder as he’s settled in someone’s lap like a *child*.

“You’re more trouble than you’re worth,” the deep voice rumbles as he squeezes his eyes shut with a whimper. “Hey-“ His face is framed, arm moving to keep his head supported as the seam in his mask clicks open. “Drink.” A straw nudges at his lips and he makes a miserable attempt at catching it but-

Everything is thick and sluggish and he can’t remember how to work the right muscles and after a long moment the cup is lowered down even as he groans in protest.

“’rsty,” Tommy complains, arms aching behind his back as he knocks the side of his face against the warm chest in protest.

“I heard you the first time,” the voice grumbles. “Be patient or I’ll leave you right where you are.”

Tommy’s head is settled, tipped back, before the edge of glass nudges at his lips, pressing down against his teeth to open his mouth further as water spilled into his mouth in a rush of delicious, wonderful coolness and a hand strokes down his throat, encouraging his confused muscles to swallow between each paused mouthful.

He closes his lips at the sixth one, feeling his stomach grumble in protest.

His mask clicks shut a moment later.

“You’re lucky I owe Dream a favour,” the voice rumbles to him as he’s lifted up, covers rustling before he’s lowered down against a soft pillow that he sinks against, covers pulled up soon after, settling somewhere at his shoulders as he twists to burrow down as best as he could.

Chapter End Notes

Ayo, my guys

I've been waiting to get to the next chapter since I published the first chapter. So. Hi.

I'm flooring this train ride so strap in tight :)

And wherever you are when you read this, I hope you're having a good one. Much love<3

-

If you're interested there's a [Hush Now Discord](#) that tends to go *brrrrr* with the theories in designated channels and also have a lot of fun chatter and chill people on top of scoops of chaos with my lovely mods<3

You can find me on **tumblr** here: [corpse-art](#)
And I'm also on **twitter** now here: [corpsey_art](#)

I post a one hour countdown on all my social medias for a new chapter update if you're interested in such a thing :)

-

DUDES. We have new Hush Now art!! They're all amazing. Go and give them all so much love<3

(and if i ever miss linking your art- pls let me know!! i try to make sure i keep track of everything but i am but human)

[A Phone Call by a_hacked_vessel](#) art

[FANART MASTERPOST](#)

Chapter 30

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy wakes up roughly, a hand grasping at the back of his hoodie and hauling him up, his legs kicking out as he twists with a snarl under the unimpressed red eyes of the Blood God holding onto him, arm outstretched where Tommy half-dangles, heart pounding, bare toes brushing the cold ground as he stretches them out to try and find his footing.

“Let me go,” Tommy grunts as he jerks his shoulders, arms still thoroughly pinned against his back, swinging in an awkward balance.

The Blood God leans closer and Tommy shrinks back, narrowing his eyes as the red eyes flicks over his, studying him, apparently satisfied with whatever he finds because Tommy’s released abruptly and he stumbles before straightening up. “What-“

“You have two hours to get yourself looking like you’ve got a handle of things,” Blood God interrupts him and-

Ill-ease threads through him.

“What are you talking about?” Tommy demands as the Villain bends down and hauls up a box, dropping it unceremoniously on his bed. “Why do I-“

“Congratulations, Theseus, you’re about to participate in your first Syndicate meeting.” Blood God pries the box open and Tommy steps closer despite himself, heart pounding at the sight of his hoodie, freshly washed at the top of it. “We took the liberty of supplying you with something other than *jeans*.”

Tommy feels his ears grow warm. “They’re better protection than most fabrics,” he grumbles.

Blood God doesn’t comment, picking up the hoodie and dropping it down, unpacking his wrist braces, socks, underwear, pants that looked like a proper blend of cotton, nylon and basalt at a quick glance, and the sneakers Nemesis had gotten for him and-

There is a new toolbelt, slim with sensible pouches, red tinted goggles, new fingerless gloves with thick straps to reinforce his wrists, knee guards with gleaming metal, everything a near perfect copy of what he’d worn as a Hero, before-

He swallows.

There is no under armour and the gun Nemesis had given to him is missing but it’s more than he’s had since forced out of the tower and he stares down at the long-sleeved turtleneck in the same brand Dream had worn beneath his neon green hoodie.

“My-“ His voice cracks and he clears his throat. “There was a scarf,” he forces out roughly.

Blood God raises a brow at him. "You'll have to ask Warden about such a thing but I didn't see one."

Tommy blinks.

"Oh- I." His brow furrows, stomach knotting uncomfortably. "Will he- is he going to be at the meeting as well?"

"Yes." The Villain reaches out for him and Tommy tenses but allows the hand to curl around his wrist, twisting him around with tug to unlock the metal and free his arms with a hiss through his teeth at the pain as he slowly brings them forward, his left hand reaching to massage at his sockets because *fucking ow*. "As will many others." His voice is dry.

"Lovely," Tommy mutters, throwing a glance at the bed. "I guess- it doesn't matter."

Blood God grunts noncommittally, dropping the metal clasps beside the gear.

They're thick and broad, spanning half-way up his wrists when locked in place, and Tommy forces his gaze away from them.

His right wrist dangles broke and useless at his side, two fingers twisted awkwardly from when the Warden had slammed him up against the wall, hand catching awkwardly and snapping in the path, his wrist for sure splintered in more than one place.

There's something he doesn't understand curling in his gut as he glances up at the Villain, a half-blurred memory of something he can grasp at but makes him take a step back.

"So- what changed?" Tommy forces out, shoving down the anxiety curling in his gut. "Why is the meeting being held now?" *And why the fuck am I being invited into it?*

He doesn't remember returning to his room, his thoughts less sluggish than they had been, but there's an awareness that *he's missing something* and he doesn't like it, the hair on the back of his neck rising at the look in those blood red eyes.

"There's a big announcement happening today." The Villain steps back to lean against the wall and Tommy lets out a small breath in relief at the distance between them.

"Any idea what it's about?" Tommy frowns.

"Beats me," the Blood God shrugs, eyes lingering on him. "But you're about to be there to see it."

A shiver runs down his spine and Tommy-

Fuck, he can only hope it's not something that will be pinned on him, he's already in bad enough waters as it is.

He sways, ducking his head to wipe his brow against the red hoodie he'd been in for two days now, wrinkling his nose because he'd for sure spent the night cold sweating, the clinging wetness down his spine a telling thing.

“I’ll go take a shower then,” he mutters.

-

There’s relief in strapping himself into proper gear, even with the pouches on the belt being empty, and the lack of under armour still meaning he was very much vulnerable.

He lingers, fingers gliding over the simple, thin metal wrap around his wrist, pressing down with his thumb to try and slide over the scarred flesh but-

There’s no give, no movement, the metal heating, as if in warning.

It’s only dumb luck that his lack of powers hasn’t been revealed yet.

The Warden had been more focused on making sure he had no weapons on him, barely sparing it a glance, and the Blood God had offered little interest in searching him, perhaps trusting that the Warden had already taken care of it since Tommy hadn’t broken out during the two weeks he’d been stuck in that small room with only pain and the stench of himself for company.

Besides- it’s not likely that anyone would know what to make of it.

Bad had always been an otherly, a demon, ancient and old, his skills with enchantments something he refused to share.

“It dies with me.”

There’s a part of Tommy that regrets not demanding more, at least a crumb of understanding for what rests around his wrist, but he hadn’t known it was possible to rob him so completely of something so integral to who he *is*.

What he’s supposed to be.

His nails curls to dig into flesh but he halts himself, swallowing and forcing his hand to relax.

He reaches for the right glove, forcing it down over the bruised macabre mess of his hand and strapping it tight over the metal and tugging down the sleeve of his hoodie roughly.

A Syndicate meeting? Tommy can do that.

He *has* to.

There is no other choice, the Blood God waiting for him just outside the door, any chance of escape so entirely beyond him that it’s fucking *ridiculous*.

He digs the heel of his palm into his eyes, breathing in sharply, forcing his lungs to expand, pressing up against his ribs before lowering rough in a rough exhale.

He reaches for his goggles and forces them up over his eyes, the motion awkward with only one hand to manage it with.

He double checks to make sure his hair is all hidden beneath the dark red beanie that looked *way* too suspiciously like the one Siren had worn every time Tommy had seen him.

He tries not to think about it.

He doesn't spare a look at himself in the mirror.

He has a feeling he won't like what he sees.

-

Tommy misses his powers.

He misses a weapon, something, *anything* to protect himself.

He misses Dream.

He-

-

The Angel is waiting for them with a bottle of potion that swings from sharp black talons curling elegantly to hold it around the neck.

He's sitting on the armrest of one of the couches, wings relaxed, those eerie blue eyes sharpening on him with a stretch of his facial features that tells of a smile behind his mask.

A small petty part of Tommy wants to shove him off it.

"This is a diluted mix of harm and weakness, just enough to keep your system from going into immediate shock," the Angel greets him as Tommy is let down by the Blood God, jaw clenched tight at his own weakness as he tugs roughly at the hem of his hoodie. "If you're lucky you'll be able to keep your wits about." A tilt of the Villain's head, a dark sort of amusement. "You'll need them."

Fuck you too, Tommy thinks as he reluctantly approaches the Villain, shoulders curling tight as he reaches out to take it from talons that relinquishes it willingly.

His knowledge about potions are bad but if they're anything like drugs he knows that quitting abruptly is a fucking dangerous thing so he can only trust that the Angel knows what he's doing.

The feather is soft against his skin and he clings to it with all his might.

They need me alive. He presses down on his mask to unlock the hidden seal that stretches from ear to ear, opening up as he reluctantly opens his jaw and presses the glass against his lips. *They need me to answer questions*.

He downs it, shuddering and trying desperately not to gag as his instincts blares in *dangerdangerdanger* with the way his throat forces it down, his mind remembering all too

well the helplessness that came with having his mouth pried open and-

“Should add something for the taste,” Tommy forces out after pressing up with the heel of his palm to seal his mask shut again with a grimace.

“It would unfortunately ruin the potion and the result would be hard to tell,” the Angel laughs, a sound that startles him to drawing back, blinking at the man. “There’s no way around it tasting like shit.”

“Yeah,” Tommy gets out with a breath, discomfited in a way he doesn’t understand. “Something like that.”

“Would you like to know the ingredients?” There’s a teasing cadence in the Angel’s voice and Tommy furrows his brows, glancing down at the glass bottle.

“... Something tells me I’d rather not know.”

“So you *do* have a brain inside that hardheaded skull of yours,” the Blood God drawls and Tommy stiffens, turning to glower at the tall Villain with his sweeping cloak and jutting crown of golden spikes. “I was starting to wonder.”

“What is *that* supposed to mean?” Tommy demands suspiciously.

“You know what weakness and harm does, Blood God,” Angel admonishes before tipping forward, palms pressing against the arm of the couch between the spread of his legs, something that’s almost *playful* in the flaring of his wings. “You think you’re up to survive your first Syndicate meeting, little Sparrow?”

Tommy frowns at him.

“Sparrow?” he echoes dubiously. “I’m not an avian,” he says flatly.

The Angel considers him, a curious sort of gleam to his eyes.

“Did you know that in some folklores of old, sparrows were considered an omen of *death*?” There’s a lilt to the Angel’s voice, something that he doesn’t understand in the way the other watches him. “In some parts of the world it was thought that, a person who catches a sparrow must kill it or their family would die.” The Angel’s eyes doesn’t veer from his for a long moment before the Villain eases back with a dismissive flick of his wrist. “It’s all old superstition, of course.”

“If you’re gonna be like that,” the Blood God drawls. “Then you might as well tell him they also symbolize productivity and *cooperation*.”

Tommy twitches.

“... Right,” he mutters, reminding himself to breathe with a sharp inhalation as he looks away from the eerie blue gaze. “Thanks for that well of information, I’ll make sure to treasure it.”

“Don’t choke on that sarcasm,” Blood God snorts as he glances on the clock on the wall. “We need to get going.”

A blindfold is pulled from the Angel’s pocket with a little wave and Tommy gives him a flat look even as his stomach curls with dread.

The Villain slips off the armrest with an easy sort of elegance, approaching on silent steps as Tommy’s shoulders go rigid.

“Where- are we going exactly?” he demands warily, muscles twitching to move back, *to get the fuck out*, completely and utterly disinterested in having his vision robbed from him.

But he forces himself to remain still as the Angel circles around him, arms reaching past either ear, the knuckles of the Angel’s thumbs pushing his goggles up and slipping the soft cloth in place, Tommy’s heart pounding wetly inside his chest in growing panic he *hates*.

“You’ll just have to see when we get there, little Sparrow,” the Angel murmurs into his ear as he knots it tight in place before his touch disappears with a near silent rustle behind him before he hears nothing at all.

Tommy stands, hardly daring to breathe, fingers twitching at his sides, the silence a creeping thing that makes his jaw clench tight.

The scent of something tickles his nose and he lifts his head up.

“I can either carry or you can hold onto my cloak,” the Blood God tells him gruffly.

Tommy swallows, a tremble running through him, anxiety he doesn’t understand crawling through his limbs and he wants his fucking *sight* back, nausea clawing up the back of his throat as he blinks behind the cloth.

He’s so fucking sick of feeling helpless.

“Your- let me ride on your back,” he demands hoarsely before clearing his throat. “I’m not-fucking arm-cradle shit again.”

A huff, a low breath of air, but he hears the Villain shift in front of him, something pooling down on the floor.

“Angel-“

“I’ve got it,” the Angel’s voice from his left makes him flinch.

“I’m right in front of you,” the Blood God rumbles and Tommy breathes in before he reaches out a hand tryingly, finding a shoulder and leaning down awkwardly to hook his arm around the Villain’s neck, grasping into a thin fabric at the front on his chest, a startled *oomph* escaping him as he was abruptly hoisted up, hands finding the fold of his knees to get him up properly.

He realizes, a bit startled, that the Villain had removed his cloak, leaving Tommy all too aware of the fact that there's a person he's holding onto, warm beneath the press of his chest, able to feel the way the Blood God breathes a gusty sigh beneath him as he stepped forward.

"Next time you're carrying him."

There's an answering laugh and Tommy's fingers curls tight in the white fabric of the elegant shirt, slumping down to press his forehead against the base of Blood God's neck with a shiver.

-

Tommy misses *Wilbur*.

It feels like he's falling with no-one to catch him, clinging with tooth and to keep from drowning, a pretense he fails at with every flinch and twitch of his limbs.

He wants his friend to throw an arm around his shoulder and drag him close, to tell him everything is going to be okay and tell him-

"I've got you."

He wants his room with the silly painted walls and he wants his discs, to hear Wilbur's voice in the night, reading to him to fill the silence.

And he hates it, *hates himself*, because he might never have any of it again and-

He has to get to Dream, he has to solve it, because it's eight years of history and loyalty, eight years of staying steady and firm at Dream's side, so fucking *proud* of who'd he'd come to be at his mentor's side.

He doesn't think he can ever forgive himself for leaving Wilbur if it all amounts to **nothing**.

-

Tommy is distantly aware of the fact that he's drifted off again sometime during the car ride and when he's hauled up into a pair of strong arms he doesn't protest, determined to catch as much sleep as possible before whatever fuckery awaits him.

His body feels heavy and distant where his head presses against a warm chest and he can't be bothered to care.

For just a few minutes he feels almost floaty, as if he's in a body not his own, free to not care with the hazy tiredness that pulls at him to fall asleep with the easy soothing motion of steps beneath him.

And then he's abruptly dumped down on a couch and his stomach lurches and he groans, one hand reaching up to claw the blindfold off with a bleary blink up above him.

“You’ve got ten minutes.” The Blood God peers down at him with unforgiving red eyes and Tommy bares his teeth behind his mask. “Angel said for you to drink something sweet.”

Tommy frowns, lips pulling down.

“You’ve got any cola?” he asks roughly as he pushes himself up into a sitting position with a brief swaying from the dizziness that hits him. “I deserve some fucking cola.”

“What are you, a child?” the Blood God huffs.

“It’s good for nausea,” Tommy grumbles as his stomach twists. “Bread- I could do with some bread as well.”

“Not-“

“I’m gonna fucking vomit if I don’t get something into me.” Tommy slumps back, squeezing his eyes shut. “Fucking potion bullshit.”

A rough breath. “Fine,” Blood God groans. “But this is the last I’m doing for you.”

Tommy considers flipping him off.

Ultimately decides that it isn’t worth the effort, focusing on breathing in and out and not vomit into the inside of his mask because that would be a decidedly *unfun* experience.

Tommy knows that he’s in the absolute worth shape to join a fucking Syndicate meeting but it’s not like anyone is going to stop and ask his opinions on things.

If he vomits during the meeting he’s aiming for the Blood God’s boots, he decides, cracking one eye open and then the other, blinking at the wooden ceiling above him.

He slowly tips his head, taking in the room around him.

And-

It looks like a fucking *hotel foyer*, only sized down and compacted with walnut walls, dark and rich in colour, large paintings towering up and there’s white seating in fancy looking chairs and couches and-

“What the fuck-“ he breathes. “Who picks *white furniture*. That’s so impractical.”

Blood God pauses where he’d been approaching with a can of cola, giving him a look, but Tommy barely notices, his attention stolen by one of the paintings behind the Villain.

It’s a rich mix of reds and yellows, lava pooling like a river against red rocks that towers and forms around it and-

Tommy wouldn’t have thought twice about it if it wasn’t for strange trees with webs of blue visible in the background where the red stone like ground trades for a mix of mossy teal and brighter cyan, web like plants of red crowding beside mushrooms in blue and orange.

It's the *Nether*.

As if brought alive from one of Bad's stories, right there in front of him, the world that piglins and blazes and other mobs were supposedly born in, a near perfect rendition of Bad's nostalgic and fond descriptions that weaved it in detail as Tommy sat curled on the floor in front of the couch, listening with wide-eyes on the demon.

There's a strange sort of *awe* flooding through his chest, his breath catching as his eyes darts over the detailing on it, and-

It's *beautiful*.

A world so different from the modern rise of skyscrapers and concrete streets that had paved over lush green landscapes, a world that was, Bad had said, once connected via obsidian portals lightened with flint and steel.

"It's where I was born, from fire and heat," Bad had told him, hands curling in his lap, tension in knuckles hidden by the fold of his black cloak. *"One day I wasn't, and then one day I was."*

A demon of the hellscape of the Nether.

"You're looking awfully interested in that painting," the Blood God comments as a cold can of cola and a piece of white toast is dropped down on the table in front of him, the bread wrapped half-heartedly in a napkin.

Curiosity bubbles up inside of him, questions that begs to be answered, but-

"It's beautiful," Tommy forces out, reaching out to snatch the toast and focusing down on it instead. "What is it?"

Blood God's eyes lingers on him.

"The meeting is in five minutes."

Tommy's stomach twists and he splits his mask open before biting down, tasting nothing as he forces himself to chew.

-

If Tommy is honest with himself, he doesn't know what to expect.

He walks shoulders set straight and stomach churning from nausea and too much fizzy soda that had done little to settle the nervous energy beneath his skin, his skin beading with cold sweat.

The Villain is tall, almost regal where he walks in front of him, Tommy just a step behind, a silent shadow with only the barest hint of a limp as he forces his heel down against the ground, whatever Ponk had done to it erasing a good bit of the pain but still prickling with white webbed hotness.

It's easy enough to ignore as he throws a glance up at the Blood God with the mantle back in place over his shoulders, the hem swaying at his ankles with the easy steps of his boots against the marble flooring.

The décor is bizarre and he feels like he's stepped into a long winded corridor in some sort of manor but they're clearly underground, no windows to be seen, and *where the fuck is he?* How had the Syndicate gotten away with something like *this* hidden away from Hero and Enforcer sight alike?

This isn't anything like the cold concrete walled hide-out he'd been taken to and then the one he'd woken up in with Warden. Instead there's history painted and hung on the walls, clearly a space that they'd made permanent for themselves.

They reach a door at the end of the corridor and the Villain stops in front of him, head craning to look down at him.

Tommy meets his gaze, blood red, such a rich crimson colour, impossible to forget with the heaviness they regard him.

Few remembers what piglins had looked back in the days of old.

Some say that they were great hulking beasts, savage and dangerous, guarding their gold more ferociously than anything else.

Bad had mentioned piglins only briefly- fiddling with a small rune on a rock and refusing to meet his eyes.

"There's many misunderstandings in the way history has been recorded and controlled- especially when it comes to those who carry the bloodlines of old. It was not the gold that Piglins guarded and protected with their lives, though you cannot ignore the importance of it to them."

The Blood God's jaw is a carved thing beneath his mask, his skin soft pink, his lips a darker shade and curving in amusement with jutting tusks of bright white wrapped in gold at the base.

His crown a jagged thing of spikes set in a band of gold, rings around his fingers and hoops in ears where the tips fold down and there's a red sash around his waist, matching in shade to the cloak that broadens the shape of his shoulders, a golden chain keeping it clasped in place.

The great axe he carries had been strapped back to his back, a wicked curving thing of danger.

Tommy's never truly had a chance to stand and look at the Blood God this close – to admire the picture he makes, towering over a head taller than him, stronger than him, hardier than him, a cleverness in his eyes and rich loyalty to his family that Tommy, at the end of the day, *understands*.

A Villain whose wounds steam, closing up, unfaltering as he carves his path with blood and violence.

A monster in the eyes of some.

It's an unfair thing.

There are Villains far more cruel but far more human that doesn't garner them the same reputation of fear.

Tommy raises his chin.

He's exhausted, his body aches, bruised dark beneath his clothes, there's potions still running through his veins, muddling his thoughts, and he doesn't know where he stands in life anymore, lost without Dream's guiding hand.

His neck prickles with an instinctive need to duck his head, to bare his throat, an itchy crawling in the gums of his jaw as he stands beneath the eyes of a predator.

But he does not falter, standing at his full height, refusing to cover.

His life rests in this man's hands, they both know it, but Tommy has never been a coward.

Afraid, yes, terrified to the point that he's felt like he's heaving for air with no sanity left in his mind, but it's never been cowardly.

Blood God is his ticket back to Dream.

Tommy can't afford to lose now, even drugged and weak as he is with his powers locked away with a shackle around his wrist.

"You're smart, you know you can't afford to do anything in a room filled with Villains," the Blood God rumbles and Tommy clenches his jaw tight. "Cooperate, *behave*, and I will make sure you leave the room alive."

And-

The thing that makes Tommy's loyalty dangerous has always been his willingness to die for it.

It's his willingness to sacrifice everything, including, and perhaps especially, his life.

He doesn't let the rot take root in his heel because he has a desire to die, but rather because he knows there's only so far the human mind can be pushed before he slips up and says something he can't take back for just a breath or respite, for just a moment of pain-free reality.

He'd sooner die than be the reason these Villains gets something that can be used against his mentor.

There's compromises in life, in knowing that Blood God wants Siren back, that Dream is doing something that is going against all his morals, and Tommy-

Tommy had *promised* him.

"We don't kill."

It's ingrained into his very existence as a Hero and Red Chaos.

And-

He's not a Hero anymore.

He doesn't know how much exists of himself as Red Chaos anymore.

But he's still Dream's.

"Let's just get this over with," Tommy huffs and Blood God gives him a sharp smile as he pushes the door open and-

Tommy takes a step forward.

And then another.

Right into the den of his enemies.

-

Dream, fourteen-years-old, blows out a breath that mists in the dark cold night above him, Tommy huddled up in his arms, tucked beneath the older's chin.

It's the first snow of winter, falling soft and slow, and neither of them have the right clothes, but Dream had cornered him with a blanket and a box of takeout food, a rare treat, and they sit on the fire escape outside their apartment.

The blanket is pulled over Dream's shoulders and swept to cover Tommy for all but his feet despite his best attempts but there's thick socks on his feet and he finds that he doesn't mind, belly full from naan bread and chicken in a thick hot sauce that had made Dream splutter and reach hurriedly for the pitcher of tap water

Thank you for finding me, Tommy thinks sleepily as he twists to press his cheek against the older's chest.

Dream tenses, breathes out, an arm looping slowly around his shoulder and tugging at the blanket to make sure it was properly tucked around him before drawing him close as Tommy shuts his eyes, sure in his place, at the knowledge that, for the first time in his life, he belongs somewhere.

Right here, at Dream's side.

Chapter End Notes

Alright my guys- so this is actually the beginning half of a long chapter I ended up splitting in two so around an hour from now I'm going to be dropping the second half of it.

And I'm giving you all a fair warning now: **mind the tags for this fic.**

That said- hi! I'm terribly terribly excited for the second part of this so I'm just go set that up for posting because you guys are in for a *treat*.

Hold onto your hats, strap in tight, this train is going full steam ahead :)

-

If you're interested there's a [Hush Now Discord](#) that tends to go *brrrr* with the theories in designated channels and also have a lot of fun chatter and chill people on top of scoops of chaos with my lovely mods<3

There's also a there's also a Hush inspired rp-server running if that's something you're interested in which you can find here [Hush Now Rp-Server](#)

You can find me on **tumblr** here: [corpse-art](#)
And I'm also on **twitter** now here: [corpsey_art](#)

I post a one hour countdown on all my social medias for a new chapter update if you're interested in such a thing :)

-

DUDES. We have new Hush Now art!! They're all amazing. Go and give them all so much love<3

(And if I ever miss linking your art- pls let me know!! I try to make sure I keep track of everything but I am but human)

[Hush Now Cover by sleeepy_frog](#) art

[The Angel of Death by owlwinter8](#) art

[Red Chaos by beezaz](#) art

[Rose by PlantChecker](#) art

[3/4 SBI by PlantChecker](#) art

[Hush Now Cover by sleeepy_frog](#) art

[Strings That Tie Me by frabbitx](#) art

[Sam & Fran's by Plant Checker](#) art

[Red Chaos by Ghosting_14](#) art

[Red Chaos by teeth_whale](#) art

[Wilburfication by PlantChecker](#) art

[The Guy by blissfali](#) art

[The Amazing Slimecicle by kathyrealmstales](#) art

[Trippy RC by limechi_](#) art

[Breathe, Theseus by nah84259951](#) art

[FANART MASTERPOST](#)

Chapter 31

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

If there's a comparison to be made for the feeling that twists tight inside of him as several eyes veers towards him, focusing with a pin sharp precision, then Tommy has no words for it.

There's iron in his spine and lead in his steps as he takes in the room- the same rich wooden walls as the area outside, couches and chairs spread around a round table that sits at the center and a television set up on one of the walls in easy viewing.

The light is dim, cast from pendant lights stretching down from the ceiling, and there's additional light at a small barcounter behind the bottles of alcohol piled on rows of shelves, glasses turned upside down on the sleek wood, a large plastic rubber duck with sunglasses and a tiny blue beanie seated on the counter of it.

A small tacky *Las Nevadas* sign in neon blue flickers on the wall of it and there's a black apron folded on one of the round chairs.

The room in itself isn't overly large, leaving him all too aware of how little space it left him between him and-

Villains.

People he's fought.

People whose powers had on more than one occasion had had him pressing his palms flat against his skin to halt the blood dripping out of his body or, worse, *Dream's*.

People whose powers had brought terror and adrenaline alike crashing through his system.

There's eight of them in total, more and somehow less than he'd expected where he halts while the Blood God continues forward, twisting to sink back in a red armchair in a lazy sprawl, ankle folding in top of one knee and chin coming to rest against the press of fingers as he leans his elbow on the armrest.

Behind him Tommy hears the door close shut and he feels a prickling of eyes at the back of his neck, head tilting to observe Eris as they settle, standing, behind an empty chair with a clasp of hands behind their back.

Well, there's that confirmation, Tommy thinks, staring at them because-

It's the first time he's seen Eris this close- their golden cape a thin elegant thing that hangs off one shoulder, connected to a leather halter top with straps beneath their arms to keep it in place, the fabric reaching high to wrap around their throat. A corset of red, threaded with wither roses in black, and black leather pants with high heeled boots.

The crown, different from the Blood God's, with gems set as eyes in the strange three skeletal heads at the front and their mouth covered by a mask of gray with a curving sharp smile, sunglasses hiding their eyes.

Leather gloves on their hands, a telling of their power, the ability to infect anyone they touch with the withering, a death sentence.

The Angel has claimed a backless chair for himself, leaning forward with his elbows on his knees, eyes shadowed by the brim of his hat and ash blond hair brushing alongside the jawline of his mask, his katana sheathed and settled on top of his thighs in a silent warning.

Tommy's eyes flicks only for a second to the Warden in his heavy golden armour, past Ponk who is looking nervous, one leg bouncing, seated beside the tall creeper hybrid, the only one notably not dressed up, wearing a simple jacket and jeans and-

He recognizes the Vigilante Faux Pas only because of the poncho like cloak in black with golden trim, hoodie drawn up but the snout of their fox mask peeking out, a simplistic thing in small square pattern, as if folded by paper, orange head and white jaw, nose and eyes black.

There are two Tommy cannot place.

The first a tall person in an ill-fit suit, rumbled at the shoulders, a long tail with a white tuft flicking nervously behind them. His face is covered in a round mask with large holes for mismatched eyes in bright green and red set in a face split down in black and white from what Tommy can see, hair matched but opposite. His ears are long, almost elfin, and speckles of gold flecks beneath his eyes, barely visible but there with a low sheen.

A hybrid, most likely a split between two very opposite ones, and if Tommy were to gamble, the black side was most likely part Enderman.

Thought what the *fuck* the other side was meant to be he has no fucking clue.

Tommy eyes the strange crown on their head, almost papery, lacking a sheen, before forcefully shifting his gaze to the smaller of the two.

Despite being inside they're stuffed into a large thick winter coat in mossy green, lined generously in thick white cotton around the hood, pulled up, collar and hems, a small daisy embroidered over his heart, and Tommy twitches at the ram mask staring almost mockingly back at him, skeletal with curling large dark horns in an eerie copy of Schlatt's, a pair of glowing green eyes meeting his with gleaming sort of curiosity that makes his skin crawl.

There's a single hard chair placed in front of the Villains with the back towards the door and Tommy can take a hint even if he's not about to heed it.

Tommy digs his fingers into whatever bravery and bullshittery remains in his soul and grins behind his mask as he spreads his hands.

“Quite the welcome for little ‘ol me.” He makes a deliberate turn, stepping back, making a show of admiring the space around him without really seeing anything. “It’s a fancy place you’ve got here,” he continues. “Could do with a little more lightning, I’ll be honest, but-maybe it’s that whole Villain aesthetic.”

The silence is a stretching thing around him as he faces down the Villains in front of him.

“I recognize all of you but two.” Tommy stretches his arms up, ignoring the way his shoulders strains in protests as he claws down on the broken fingers on his right hand to pin them against the back of his head. “Is this where we do the introduction thing? I’ve heard some people pass a thing around to signify the speaker-“

“You can call me Judge.” The interruption is from the shorter of the two newcomers and Tommy’s muscles ripples because-

It’s been *years* since he last heard the name Schlatt had worn during his early days as a Hero, young and fresh out of the academy with clever eyes and a sharp grin beneath his mask as he introduced himself with a flourish as Tommy nibbled on a piece of bread, watching the television screens from the window of a store.

It had been met with a lot of scorn- his horns curling dark, one of the first hybrid’s to quickly climb the ranks.

He’d only worn the mask and title for two years before he’d discarded them both, making himself comfortable simply as *Schlatt*.

“I don’t have anything to hide,” Schlatt had said at the announcement, his ram mask seated in his lap as he raised his head to look into the camera with dark eyes, the first Hero to bare his face for the world willingly. *“What you see is what you get.”*

“Judge, huh,” Tommy tastes slowly, staring at the other because-

The room in Schlatt’s tower had been an empty thing, preserved, as if waiting for someone’s return, and it’s so fucking *blatant* that this person has an issue, or seven, with Schlatt.

It was possible but Tommy doesn’t care enough to linger on it. He has more important things to focus on.

Like staying alive.

“And you?” He turns to the other who straightens up, eyes wide where they meet his for only a second before veering aside.

“That’s Lethe.” It’s Judge who answers him, looking relaxed where he sits, jacket rustling as he shifts forward. “I’ve been waiting to meet you, Red Chaos.”

Tommy twitches. “Right, well, I have no fucking idea who you are so-” He shrugs as he lowers his arms down because they’re in risk of starting to tremble, his palm coming down on top of the back of the waiting chair, leaning surreptitiously against it with a brief

clenching of his knuckles. “I believe there was supposed to be some broadcast of some sort so- we waiting for that or-“

“Why don’t you sit down.” It’s Eris, their voice a softer thing than Tommy had expected, their voice changer a smooth thing, more human than most chose to make them.

“In this chair?” Tommy snorts. “Yeah, no, I think I’ll stay standing.”

He’s already got his back to the fucking door, he’s not doing this shit, and even if he knows there’s little he can do about anything to defend himself it doesn’t mean he’s going to be blatantly fucking *stupid*.

The sleeve of his hoodie is long enough to hide the white press of his knuckles, even if he hadn’t been wearing his gloves.

“We’re still waiting for one more person,” the Blood God rumbles with a flick of his red eyes, lingering on him for a moment. “The announcement isn’t until another forty.”

Tommy winces internally.

“Lovely,” he bites out. “So we’re all sitting ducks.”

“Gives us a chance to get to know each other,” Angel muses with a tug of his facial features that tells of the smile behind his mask.

Tommy deliberates and then he pushes off the chair, taking a demonstrative step forward, and-

The Warden and Ponk sits to his left, the Angel almost immediately across him, to the left, the Blood God in an armchair on the right of the middle couch, Judge and Lethe to his right and-

He steps up on the low table, his muscles and bruises crying out in protest as he heaves himself up on it in a single smooth motion, ducking his head to avoid the dangling lights as he measures his steps across it before taking a deliberate step off the table and turning on his heel to sprawl down on the couch with a spread of his arms across the back of it with a grin behind his mask.

“I’m all about that bonding,” Tommy proclaims as he throws one foot up on the table, and then the other. “So what are we doing- twenty questions? I can do twenty questions-“

“*Theseus*. ”

“Don’t you *Theseus* me,” Tommy rolls his head to meet red eyes, very handily to his immediate left. “We’re here to make sense of whatever the fuck is going on so *get to it then*. ”

It’s a challenge, a grasp for control, something to hold onto and Tommy *dares them* to try something when he’s playing along.

“That’s Siren’s spot.” It’s Lethe, a note of nervousness in his voice, tail flicking in agitation.

“Don’t care,” Tommy bites back. “It’s not like he’s here to use it anyway.”

The tension that racks up in the room makes the hair on the back of his neck rise.

“I think twenty questions sounds fun,” Judge claps his hands together as he leans forward. “Does that mean we *all* get twenty questions-“

“If you think I’m working out eighty questions to ask in return you’re dead wrong,” Tommy says flatly. “I don’t care who asks the question but I’m counting you guys like-“ He makes a half circle with his left hand. “*A Syndicate. A unit.*”

“I’m technically not part of the Syndicate,” Faux Pas comments with a cough to hide a laugh.

“Then don’t play,” Tommy snips at him. “So?” he challenges, relaxing back, the picture of arrogance where he sits with false bravado he doesn’t really feel, heart pounding wetly inside his chest.

Still alive. His lungs expands and then lowers. *I’m still alive-*

“When did you first meet Dream?” It’s Judge, bodily leaning forward now, eyes gleaming as they meet his.

Tommy blinks slowly at him.

He hadn’t actually expected anyone to take him up on it but- his shoulders eases just a bit where he sits in a weirdly comfortable couch, feet on a table with odd scratches, his right heel resting just inches shy of a strange carved fish in the wood.

“Eight years ago.”

“But you didn’t become a Hero until two years ago.” Judge meets his gaze without fear. “Almost three.”

“Have you never played twenty questions before?” Tommy bares his teeth behind his mask. “It’s my turn to ask.”

Judge pauses, glancing at Blood God before leaning back with an easy shrug against Lethe’s side.

Tommy licks his lips behind his mask, wincing at the dry chapped feel of them as he considers, and-

He turns his eyes to the Angel who tilts his head, the glow of his blue eyes an eerie thing in the cast of shadow from his brim.

“What’s your favourite food?”

The Villain’s wing twitches on his back, an odd look flashing in those blue eyes, something close to amusement easing into the lines visible on his face.

There's crowfeet at the corner of the man's eyes, something Tommy notices a bit distantly as he waits for an answer.

"I'm fond of fried rice," the Villain answers after a moment, straightening slowly where he sits with a bird like cocking of his head and Tommy's stomach does a funny little twist. "Why the name Red Chaos?"

"Dream named me," Tommy answers after only a moment of hesitation. "He had his reasons." He turns to Lethe. "*What* are you?"

It's an incredible rude question but Tommy's not really in a state to care, furrowing his brows as the other flinches in surprise at the question, tail curling.

"Um- I don't really know?" The voice rises in pitch. "I know I'm part Enderman but the other half is... we're still trying to work that one out." There's something almost like *embarrassment* in the Villain's voice and Tommy hesitates but gives a jerky node.

A stretch of silence.

"It's your turn," Tommy points out and the Lethe jerks, straightening out, and Tommy realizes that he's very likely taller than Wilbur, lanky, almost as if he'd been stretched out, thin ears folding back. "Oh- I'm, uh, do you like cats?"

Tommy blinks.

"Sure, I like cats," he says slowly.

"Oh! Neat." Lethe's fingers fiddles with the hem of his jacket. "I'm glad. They're- I like cats as well-"

"Lethe," Blood God interrupts with something close to exasperation. "*Relax.*"

There's a twitchy little absent nod, Judge reaches out to hook his arm through the crook of one long are, and tug the other back down beside him, their fingers twining together as Judge gives the other a small squeeze.

Whoever Judge and Lethe are Tommy isn't all too sure they've been doing this Villain thing for long.

Tommy decides to focus his attention on Blood God, chewing the question through for a moment before-

"Do you know why Schlatt is interested in Siren in particular?"

Blood God snorts. "Oh, so we're done with the bullshit questions?" The Villain makes a striking picture in the elegant chair he sits on, an ease and surety in his body language that makes Tommy's instincts twitchy. "We don't *know*, we can only speculate."

Tommy drags his sneakers down on the floor.

“There has to be something. Something bad enough that Dream would-“ He halts himself, fingers curling tight in his lap. “Siren’s ability to control people-“

“He can’t use it for more than minutes at a time.” It’s the Angel this time, interrupting him. “Even if that’s what Schlatt wants him for he would find little use in it and that’s if he can even pressure Siren into using it in the first place.”

“Which I very much doubt he can,” Blood God huffs. “He’s a stubborn guy, always has been.”

It sounds truthful and Tommy chews on the inside of his cheek, brow furrowed as he stares down at his knees.

“Let me ask you this now.” Tommy glances up at the Blood God from the corner of his eyes. “If you think about it, *really* think about it, is there anything you know of that Schlatt could use against Dream?”

Tommy swallows the instinctive response, hands stilling in his lap and shoulders drawing tense.

“I keep asking myself the same question,” he says finally, something rueful and bitter creeping into his voice. “The only thing I can think of-“ He hesitates. “It’s possible that it has something to do with the hero commission but Dream- he’s always been against them, even when he’s been forced to work with them.”

He thinks of the split skin stitched together on his mentor’s back as the older boy trembled beneath him, breathing heavy and hitching as the needle threaded through his skin, pulling him together-

“Schlatt has always been envious of Dream.” The scar on his left arm is a ropy thing, a wrap of a hot whip that had sizzled against his skin where he’d stood, arm raised, Dream’s back turned behind him where he’d been preparing to leave when Tommy had seen Schlatt reach for his weapon. “They’ve never liked each other. That Dream would choose to work with him- I can’t see that happening unless Dream has something to gain from it or was pressured into it.”

“Is it possible he’s doing it as a means to keep an eye on Schlatt?” Angel asks.

“Giving him a lot of leeway there, Angel,” Blood God drawls. “Maybe he just went off the rails.”

Angel shrugs, dark wings rustling on his back. “Gotta consider all angles.”

“He tried to *kill* Siren.”

“And I’m not forgiving him for that.” Tommy flinches, shrinking on himself. “But at the same time, the one responsible for the fact that he still lives is right *here*.” Angel’s eyes are on him and Tommy’s skin crawls. “What happened that night, little Sparrow?”

“None of your business,” Tommy bites out. “And *stop calling me that*.”

Blood God opens his mouth but Tommy's eyes darts to the door at the sound of a handle turning and it opens up and-

Tommy stills in place, frozen for a horrifying second as an all too familiar figure reveals itself with the door opening wide, and-

Sapnap looks *tired*.

That's the first thing Tommy recognizes as he catches sight of Dream's friend.

Dark hair ruffled on his head, wearing a dark jacket over a white hoodie, a thin turtleneck beneath it, and black pants with straps dangling down and large pockets, one patterned with a handstitched little flame on the flap of it. It's a mix of Hero and civilian gear, his mask missing but a that familiar white bandana wrapped around his forehead.

There's dark bags beneath his eyes, a paleness to his skin that Tommy's not unfamiliar with, and the man's brown eyes finds his with a halting of steps.

And-

Something horrible bubbles up in his gut, twisting like jagged and sharp thorny vines around his heart, something hot like embarrassment mixing with a fury that threatens to swallow him alive as he bares his teeth with a rumbling of a growl that's inhuman and twisted.

"Red-"

"What the *fuck* are you doing here!?" Tommy's snarl is a hoarse jagged thing as his nails tears through the palm of his gloves and into the skin of his palm. "Do you have any idea-" He doesn't know when he'd found his feet beneath him, heart pounding loud inside his chest as he takes a step forward. "You-"

"Calm down-"

"Two months!" Tommy snarls furiously. "Two fucking *months* of you ignoring me-"

"*Remember where we are.*" Sapnap's voice is tense, a whip in the rising tension of the room as Tommy nails digs deeper into his palm, feeling the blood drip warm as it pools and drips from white tensed knuckles, hackles raised and trembling where he stands.

It tastes like betrayal.

Bitter and acidic on his tongue as he stares at Sapnap, here, amidst Villains, without so much a mask to hide his identity when he couldn't even-

"So, you two know each other, huh?" Blood God drawls.

"Fuck off," Tommy snaps without looking at him. "This is none of your fucking-"

"*Red.*" He falters, staring at Sapnap who's face is twisted with something he doesn't understand. "**Sit down.**"

Tommy's lips parts, for a moment unable to comprehend the words, his chest tight as he struggles to draw one harsh breath after the other.

"How?" Sapnap turns to Blood God, mouth twisted with brows drawn together. "He's been missing for *weeks* and he's been, what, here *all this time*?" Sapnap steps into the room, halting beside the chair that had been put out for Tommy. "Why is he here?" he demands.

"He's Dream's right man hand," Blood God drawls, a dark sort of warning in the curling of his mouth as Tommy dares to glance at him. "He's offered to help us."

Sapnap's eyes meets his, dark and unreadable, something tightening in the lines of his face.

"How?"

"Information," Angel answers after a second. "We're missing three people and having someone like Red Chaos helping us--"

"He won't."

Something like ice settles in Tommy's chest, spreading like spider webs through his body.

"Sapnap--" Tommy warns with a curling of his mouth. "Shut your fucking--"

"*You're not supposed to be here,*" Sapnap interrupts with enough bite that Tommy twitches.

"I could say the same about you," Tommy snaps back with acidic bitterness.

Sapnap's jaw tightens.

"We told you not to get involved."

"Yeah well- I am!" Tommy snarls. "So you can either accept that or fuck right off!"

Sapnap's eyes are unfathomable where they meet his, dark, unfamiliar with a tiredness that clings tight to his skin with pallor and with a twist of his chest Tommy realizes that- Sapnap, he must be worried about Jester.

"Sapnap--" His voice lowers. "You know I can't just *leave* Dream."

The man's mouth twist in a harsh thing and then he looks to Blood God with a settling of his shoulders and Tommy realizes too late the words shaping on his lips-

"He doesn't have his power."

It's a condemnation.

Tommy's eyes widening as ice cold horror spreads sharp through him and-

A hand grasps at the back of his hood and drags him bodily back as he lurches forward and Tommy snarls, twisting violently, but Blood God is faster, a strong arm looping around his chest and pinning his arms flat as his feet leaves the floor with a kick of his feet.

Tommy growls, heels pressing down hard against the armrest to send Blood God two steps back before the Villain steadies himself with a rumbling warning back, tusks white and gleaming.

“Warden-“ Angel’s voice is a distant thing, the pounding panic a horrible thing as he squirms, kicking back until someone grabs hold of his legs and Tommy’s brain short circuits horribly at the feel of metal digging into his legs, the sound that escapes his mouth inhuman with something close to hysterics that wires feral and deep.

“Let go of him!” Sapnap’s voice is a furious thing. “You’re sending him into a fucking panic attack-!”

“Be still,” Blood God rumbles in his ear as the man pins him tighter, Tommy’s head colliding back against his shoulder to try and get himself *out*-

“Stop- fucking *touching me*-“

“Then calm down,” Blood God growls, a thing that rumbles through his body with the depth of it where his back is pinned against the firm chest. “Relax. *Breathe*.”

Fuck you, Tommy thinks desperately, the rustling of armour somewhere below him skyrocketing his heartbeat as a hand grasps his chin and forces his neck back, his eyes wide and unseeing on the ceiling and he heaves for one breath after the other.

“What do you mean he doesn’t have his powers?” Angel demands out of his vision and Tommy feels his eyes burn with humiliation, a horribly ugly noise trapped and caged inside his chest as the arm around his legs gets traded out for hands curling firm, the tips of armoured fingers digging warningly into his legs and-

He whines, squeezing his eyes shut as he twists his head with a sharp jerk to press his face into Blood God’s neck, feeling the Villain still in surprise as he quivers, breaths short and fast and desperately with an echoing metallic hollowness through the voice changer in his mask.

There’s a stretch of long silence in the room.

“His wrist,” Sapnap forces out, his voice tense and hoarse. “Check his wrist- the right one.”

“I can do it,” Judge offers suddenly. “He doesn’t really know me, it might be easier.”

“Do it,” Blood God rumbles. “Easy,” he cautions to Tommy as his muscles rolls tight with tension.

“Then- make him go- make him go *away*,” his voice breaks. “Fucking- my *legs*-“

“Warden.”

“He’s-“

“I’ve got him,” Blood God’s voice is sharp.

There's a moment and then hands are slowly eased off his legs and Tommy sucks a sharp breath of relief, feeling himself be lowered just enough that his sneakers brushes against the ground, giving him an illusion of steadiness even as the grip around him doesn't ease, fingers beneath his jaw, framing his windpipe.

Blood God huffs a breath against his cheek. "Right wrist."

"I hate you," Tommy breathes against his neck. "*I hate you.*"

"I don't need you to like me," Blood God rumbles back as Tommy feels his right hand gets grasped and-

"Oh. His hand is all broken." Short fingers touches hesitantly, and then with surprising gentleness against his palm, avoiding the broken bruised mess of his fingers entirely as his sleeve was eased up.

"What the *hell!*?" Tommy squeezes his eyes shut at the sharp gasp. "What the hell have you been doing with him!?"

"You can thank Warden for that one," Blood God snorts as the heat in the room picks up. "Sapnap-"

"No- I'm not leaving this alone!" Sapnap's voice is a heavy twisted thing. "*You've tortured him!?*"

"He had information we needed," Warden's voice makes Tommy jerk against Blood God's chest, breath stuttering with a choked inhale through parted lips, and the Villain's arm squeezes against his chest.

His glove is opened up, eased off, and nausea crawls up his throat as he feels the power dampener around his wrist be revealed.

"That's a bracelet." Blood God's voice is unimpressed even as Tommy feels the man's face angling to peer closer at it where he's refusing to remove his face from the Villain's throat, refusing to look at the room at large as humiliation coils deep inside of him.

"Red-" Sapnap's voice is a faltering thing.

"Fuck off," Tommy forces out, his voice raw.

There's a rustle of wings and he flinches as he feels a sharp claw drag gently over the thick scarred mess of his wrist with a thumb that drags over the surface of it, and Tommy knows intimately that it will trigger the glow of purple from the runes burnt into the underside of it.

"Runes." The Angel of Death's voice is a breath of surprise. "Who-"

"He doesn't have access to his power." Sapnap's voice is sharp, wary but firm with the interruption. "Whatever you think you can use him for-"

"He still has information," Blood God cuts him off. "Mind your place."

The heat simmering in the room spikes sharply before disappearing completely. “My apologies,” Sapnap grits out.

“Who put it on him?” Angel’s thumb is still tracing over it, a talon dipping carefully beneath it, but there’s a responding heat and a pulse as it tightens in response, refusing to give, and the talon drags with the blunt side against his skin as it withdraws. “What’s on it?”

“Does it matter?” Sapnap demands as Tommy struggles to calm the pounding of his heart.

There’s a chill down his spine, cold sweat at the knowledge that he’d been outed as completely and utterly fucking *useless* in a room filled with his enemies.

Weak, his mind mocks him and Tommy’s mouth is dry, panic resting just beneath the surface, threatening to drag him back under.

“Well, this was fun revelation.” Blood God hoists him up and Tommy sucks a shocked breath as the Villain settles down on the couch, a hand pressing firm against his neck to guide and press his forehead down against the man’s collar, and his cheeks and ears grows hot but-

It’s strangely grounding against the harsh pounding of his heartbeat in his ears and there’s a nonchalance to the actions, not care, but-

It’s like he knows Tommy is fracturing at the seams and the only thing holding him together is the spanning of the warm palm against his neck.

“Anything more you want to share before we start the meeting?” Blood God drawls.

“What are you going to do with him?” Sapnap asks warily. “He won’t be of any use for you-“

“We’ll see about that,” Angel hums, cutting him off with a lilt of his voice that sends a shiver down Tommy’s back.

And-

He presses his forehead hard against the Blood God’s chest, eyes burning as he squeezes them shut.

-

Tommy’s attention drifts, wedged somewhere between the loud too-fast pounding of his own heart and the slow rhythmic beating of the Blood God’s.

His good hand is curled into white fabric, staining it no-doubt, but he can’t find it himself to care.

There’s a horrible rotten thing from Sapnap’s easy betrayal, the words leaving his lips so easily when Tommy had been scrambling and clawing to keep it secret, and he feels empty, like there’s a deep yawning void lapping at his ankles, threatening to rise and swallow him whole.

I need to do something.

The thought echoes uselessly at repeat, deaf to the words around him as one breath after another rasps through his parted lips.

I need to do something.

“Pull yourself together,” Blood God’s voice is a lowered thing in his ear, meant for him and him only. “We won’t harm you unless you give us reason to.”

Liar, Tommy thinks with a clenching of his jaw. *My life means nothing if it is a way for you to get Siren back.*

His fingers curls tighter.

You said so yourself.

“The broadcast is about to start,” Blood God let’s out a rough sigh. “Come on, little Hero. Where is that fabled stubbornness of yours?”

And-

A resentful part of him wants nothing more than to close his eyes, to go to sleep, to ignore everything and wake up to Dream shaking him awake with a grin and familiar warmth of his bright green eyes.

To pretend everything has nothing but a long horribly bad dream.

He’s tired.

Tired of doing so much that amounts to *nothing*.

“Theseus-“

“That’s not my name,” Tommy rasps. “So fuck off.”

There’s a pause and then a low laugh, a thumb dragging down his neck in a firm press that makes his breath hitch.

“Loyalty is an admirable thing,” Blood God muses.

And-

Tommy’s always been just *Dream*’s.

They say it as if it’s a bad thing.

As if it isn’t his greatest pride, a title he wears with his head raised tall as he stands at the top of the world at his mentor’s side, a grin playing his lips beneath his mask as he tilts his head and meets Dream’s green eyes.

Loyal to a fault, and perhaps he is.

But it's impossible to regret, even when he does.

"I just want to get back to him," Tommy confesses in a low voice.

"And if you succeed, will things be like they used to be?" Blood God nudges at him and Tommy reluctantly raises his head, meeting unreadable red eyes. "Whatever Schlatt is planning involves you as well, not only Siren. We're not about to just hand you over."

Liar, Tommy thinks, even as he reluctantly pushes back from the Villain to collapse down beside him.

He lets his head tip to rest against the man's shoulder and Blood God tenses for a brief second before huffing a breath, making no move to remove him.

If he doesn't look he can almost pretend it's Wilbur there beside him.

His eyes meets Sapnap's brown, heavy with something that isn't regret but rather something he doesn't understand, and he looks away to stare dully on the television screen on the wall where a countdown is happening in sharp neon green.

01:32

He wonders if it's intentional.

01:26

"Do you know anything about runes, Angel?"

"Some," the Angel of Death's voice is thoughtful. "It's impossible to remove without knowing what runes exactly is on it though, I can say that much."

"Fun." Blood God sighs, stretching one hand behind him to rub at his neck as Tommy's shoulders hitches to his ears.

He wants to disappear.

00:56

He doesn't want to be here.

00:50

His weakness exposed, ears warm, and he presses just an inch closer against the Villain beside him.

Against the same man who he'd eaten shitty ramen on his couch with a nature documentary running in the background.

Whose blood had stained his couch red, even after he'd scrubbed at it, a reminder as Tommy ate the stir-fry that the Angel of Death had helped him cook.

00:42

His left-hand fold over the bracelet, covering it, and he pretends not to feel the eyes on him.

He doesn't want the pity.

He doesn't want the mockery.

00:23

There's something twisting harshly in his chest, something desperate he doesn't know what to do with, his skin prickling, his mask feeling too tight against his face, every breath heavy and forced as he blinks slowly at the screen.

00:10

His nails curves into flesh, blood beading around the bracelet.

00:08

A warm hand settles on top of his, prying his fingers off.

"Stop that," Blood God grunts.

00:02

Tommy grimaces.

00:00

The screen flicks on and Tommy forgets to breathe, more than one person in the room tensing up as Dream appeared on the screen beside a bound and gagged Siren and-

The Villain doesn't look *good*.

His blue coat is missing, leaving him only in a blood-stained white button-up, beanie crammed down awkwardly with stray curls of brown barely visible and- for *once* the Villain's body isn't that strange shade of glowing blue but instead painfully human where he stands, slumped and breathing hard, the lines on his face tight, clearly in pain with his hands wrenched tight behind his back.

Siren's mask is missing, traded for a simple blue one that covers the upper part of his face, slanting down over his nose, and-

There's something horribly familiar about those brown eyes that rise to stare into the camera for a single moment before Schlatt stepped into view with a spread of his arms, mouth in a sharp grin.

“People of L’Manberg! As you can see, I’ve finally succeeded in what no-one else have managed before me.”

Tommy’s eyes locks on Dream who is holding the rope tied to Siren in a white knuckled grip.

“-this is just the beginning!” Schlatt’s words rings through the room. ***“For too long the Syndicate has been allowed to roam free on the streets of L’Manberg, allowed to do whatever they want, spreading their terror! But their reign is coming to an end. I promise you all here and now that Siren is just the beginning!”***

He takes a step back with a flourish of his fancy shoes and it has to be some sort of que because Dream takes a step forward and Siren had no choice but to stumble forward, his sharply drawn breath visible for all to see and Tommy-

Tommy can’t look away.

They’re out on the wooden platform beneath the curling branches of the Tree of L’Manberg outside the spiraling white Hero Tower.

It is said that, once, it had been a symbol of new beginnings with the buds folding out into bright green leaves in spring but it had been years since it bore any leaves at all, leaving only a large ancient relic of what had once been.

“I am here to issue you a deal, Syndicate.” Schlatt’s curling grin is a wicked thing. ***“You have one week to deliver me Red Chaos and give yourself up or Siren here-“*** He places a hand on the Villain’s shoulder, holding him in place, fingers curling tight as Siren flinches. ***“Well, it’s been some time since L’Manberg held its last public execution.”***

Form beside him Tommy hears a dangerous rumble from the Blood God, and the Angel of Death is locked in place, hand curled tight around the sheath of his sword.

Sweat beads at his brow, all too aware of the heavy axe on the Blood God’s back beside him as he slowly draws his cheek from the Villain, inch by painful inch.

His gaze meets Sapnap’s, the man giving a small slow shake of his head, pale where he sits, back straight and hands clasped tight in his lap.

Tommy opens his mouth and then he freezes in place, eyes widening as Siren suddenly lurches, knocking into Schlatt who stumbles in surprise as a chewed through gag is spat out and-

“Pogtopia-“

Tommy forgets how to *breathe*.

Schlatt’s hand grasps tight to Siren’s shoulder, to pull him back from the microphone, but Siren strains, sweat on his brow something desperate in the twist of his face, almost pleading-

“Remember Pogtopia-“

And-

It's-

Tommy's last bit of straining sanity fractures as he meets those familiar brown eyes with a realization that tears the very last desperate grasp he has on his sanity because-

That's *Wilbur*, being pulled roughly back by a harsh tug of the rope, too weak to fight as Schlatt forces him down to his knees, fingers curling tight around Wilbur's bare neck to keep him in place as Schlatt places one foot down on either side of him with a rotten sort of smile.

And-

It's wrong.

He's *hurt*-

Tommy-

He can't-

The power dampener burns against his wrist as he lurches to blindly grasp and pull the Blood God's axe from his back, heaving it with a stumbling pull as the Villain turns sharply towards him, the Angel of Death already on his feet behind him and-

If Siren is Wilbur then that means-

All this time-

"Hey now, mate, let's not be hasty," *Phil* says as Tommy backs away from them both, chest heaving and eyes darting between the room full of people and-

For a single moment he locks eyes with the Warden.

A creeper hybrid.

Just like Sam.

His back collides against a wall.

"Put down the axe," Techno cautions and Tommy stares at him without comprehension because-

It's not supposed to be possible.

He can't-

It's not supposed to be possible.

Wilbur-

Dream-

It changes everything.

And in the midst of the panic there's a sudden stretch of *understanding*.

No one is coming to save him.

Tommy can't afford the weakness anymore.

He clenches his teeth and he raises the axe, too heavy, and the very last minute he twists it, blade down as he swings it with a sickening *crunch* into his arm, wet and horrible as it split through skin, muscles, veins and bones before sinking into the wall and Tommy's mouth parts in a horrible soundless thing as the fingers on his right arm twitches uselessly and-

He slowly looks down, trembling, to stare where the blade had dug in beneath his elbow, not cut cleanly through, blood running down the limb in rivulets that's quickly staining the sleeve of his hoodie and-

There's motion from the corner of his eyes but Tommy is faster, using his hip to slam the last bit of his arm through, feeling the blade sink into his side before he lurches back, and he slams his palm blindly against his mask, splitting the seam wide open as Techno's arm loops around him and-

A sharp motion of his jaw explodes rows of sharp jagged metal teeth as he heaves his body to sink them into the hybrid's arm, his own teeth following, and there's a violent swear before-

"You're not allowed to bite hybrids, Tommy," Dream's voice echoes in the back of his mind.
"Promise me you won't."

"Get him off!" Sapnap's hands digs into his shoulders to pull but Tommy's mouth is already pooling with blood that he swallows, the familiar heady taste of power burning as it spills down his throat and-

There's voices around him, questions and Sapnap's voice furious in his ear.

Techno, the Blood God of the Syndicate, *Wilbur's brother*, slowly lifts his arm and Tommy sees his blue eyes reflected in those eyes for but a moment, red, the colour of blood, already spilling from pinprick pupils to eat away at it, and the torn flesh in his mouth sizzles at the activation of the Villain's powers and-

At the end of his own remaining stump there's an answering sizzle.

E

This is new

What is this place

Wait-

Tommy twitches, feeling fingers curling into the split seam of his mask to pry the metal out of bubbling flesh as everything slowly gets too hot around him, sweat beading on his brow, and a rough tug sends him stumbling several steps back, heaving for air and-

“What the fuck, Red-“ Dark eyes, wide with panic, hands pressing his mask shut before he jerks back. *“You know the rules-“*

Can he hear us?

His head jerks to the side, left palm coming to press against his ear as he blinks, the bottom half of his gums and the end of his spine *burning*.

He can hear us!

“Who-“ He rasps, staring at Sapnap’s moving mouth without hearing or comprehending.

L

This place could do with some fixing up-

New blood new blood new blood

Look at him-

He’s kinda cute

Aww, he’s just a child-

Blood

Tommy stills, pupils blowing wide, the voices around him fading, his attention locked on the deep rumbling voice of dark heady *hunger* that echoes inside his mind amidst the bouncing chatter of too many, encompassing and too loud as he feels his bones and mouth burn and something *snap*.

Blood for the Blood God

Chapter End Notes

We're here. Finally. Still a lot of things to clear up, I know I know, but this chapter is already at 7k and well- gotta save some fun stuff :)

Tommy has finally reached his breaking point and he's taking things into his own hands.

Or, well, *hand*.

:)

I hope it was worth the wait, I've been looking forward to this one, one of those scenes that have just stuck with me since Hush became more than a concept in my brain.

On that note- onto writing the next chapter I go because the night is still young and I'm sure you guys have some things to... take in.

Much love, hope you're having a wonderful night/day wherever you are in the world<3

-

If you're interested there's a [Hush Now Discord](#) that tends to go *brrrr* with the theories in designated channels and also have a lot of fun chatter and chill people on top of scoops of chaos with my lovely mods<3

There's also a there's also a Hush inspired rp-server running if that's something you're interested in which you can find here [Hush Now Rp-Server](#)

You can find me on **tumblr** here: [corpse-art](#)
And I'm also on **twitter** now here: [corpsey_art](#)

I post a one hour countdown on all my social medias for a new chapter update if you're interested in such a thing :)

-

DUDES. We have new Hush Now art!! They're all amazing. Go and give them all so much love<3

(And if I ever miss linking your art- pls let me know!! I try to make sure I keep track of everything but I am but human)

[Hush Now Cover by sleeepy_frog](#) art

[The Angel of Death by owlwinter8](#) art

[Red Chaos by beezaz](#) art

[Rose by PlantChecker](#) art

[3/4 SBI by PlantChecker](#) art

[Hush Now Cover by sleeepy_frog](#) art

[Strings That Tie Me by frabbitx](#) art

[Sam & Fran's by Plant Checker](#) art

[Red Chaos by Ghosting_14](#) art

[Red Chaos by teeth_whale](#) art

[Wilburfication by PlantChecker](#) art

[The Guy by blissfali](#) art

[The Amazing Slimecicle by kathyrealmstales](#) art

[Trippy RC by limechi_](#) art

[Breathe, Theseus by nah84259951](#) art

[FANART MASTERPOST](#)

Chapter 32

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Fascination.

From the moment Red Chaos had stepped into the room, his body stiff, a limp to his steps, barely there, but visible all the same despite the Hero's best attempts.

It's different seeing him this close.

The red hoodie that Red Chaos had become so famous for, the new lime green smile with the crossed-out eyes on his back visible as he stepped onto the table with a rattle, daring and challenging despite his clearly weak state as he claimed Siren's spot with a kick of his feet up on the table.

The mask on his face slots up over his nose, the hood drawn low to shadow his face, the blue of his eyes barely visible, goggles on his forehead gleaming red, ready to be pulled down in a quick move.

But despite the bravado it's clear that he's in pain, *drugged*, Eret had said with an unreadable look when they came to pick him and Ranboo up from the safe house they'd been staying at for the last two weeks.

It was a precaution.

Siren, Nemesis, Jester and Red Chaos had all disappeared without a trace in a single night with no mention on the news, nothing that spoke of them having been caught despite all the evidence pointing to just that.

And then, four days ago Warden had admitted that he had Red Chaos during a meeting, that he'd had the Hero all this time, locked up in one of their many safe houses scattered around L'Manberg.

Tubbo had sat in at the meeting, one of the many recently, an allowance because while they weren't officially part of the Syndicate they had ties to several of them and there'd been very little argument brought up when he tagged along with Eret or Techno who checked up regularly on them.

Techno's fury had been a rattling thing, Sam's shoulders stiff as he argued right back, voice sharp and raw with frustration and agony alike as his hands slammed down on the table, shoulders drawn and trembling.

"Quackity is like a son to me! If there's any chance of Red Chaos talking-

But he hadn't.

It had been a desperate gamble and it hadn't paid the results and left was a former Hero whose last evidence of existence had been his hand reaching out to grasp Nemesis' in the shopping mall she'd rescued him from.

Tubbo had wanted to come along but Techno hadn't allowed it and he'd been forced to sit and wait, pacing around the small room as Ranboo sat cross-legged on their bed with Enderchest curled in his lap, asking for any update when someone inevitably stopped by as the days counted by.

It had been mostly Eret, who had little to share, looking haggard and tired whenever they returned from their role as Royal in the Hero Tower but sparing the time to sit down and accept the tea Ranboo offered with careful handling.

There's a growing anticipation, the knowledge that Schlatt is plotting something gnawing on him.

The knowledge that he had Quackity who hated, resented, and feared the man alike.

Tubbo can't fault Sam for his desperation but something knots in his chest all the same when he eases the glove of a hand mottled in a bruised mess, so dark it almost looks like Red Chaos is wearing a second glove, two fingers twisted awkwardly, clearly broken, and then-

Silver against a wrap of thick scars, a hacksaw mess of torn flesh and harshly scratched at skin that had healed over badly, the memento of a violent desperation to free himself from it.

Tubbo is forced back when Philza steps closer, something complicated in his gaze as his thumb presses down against the wrap of silver as Red Chaos trembles, face hidden, his weakness bare to a room filled with his enemies.

His body curls stiffly when Techno brings them both down on the couch, the hold something Tubbo had once experienced himself, pragmatic, distant, brief twisting briefly in discomfort in the man's face as Red Chaos curls the fingers of his good hand into the white of his shirt, leaving prints of red in their wake.

But he doesn't push the former Hero away.

There weren't a lot of records left on mob hybrids, Philza was their most reliable source of information, but he didn't share much, perhaps for Techno's privacy.

What Tubbo does know is that a lot of interactions between Piglins had been nonverbal, sometimes appearing violent to outsiders, and Techno had a lot of hybrid blood running through his veins that left his actions hard to anticipate.

Ranboo is a steady presence at his side, an awkward figure, nervousness clear as he keeps flicking glances between Red Chaos and then Warden who sits stiff in his seat, hands curled together in his lap beside a quiet Ponk who had curled up at the very end of the couch.

Sapnap is tense where he sits and it's *curious*. He'd just revealed himself to know more about Red Chaos than he'd been willing to admit to and Red Chaos' fury at him had been filled

with a raw sort of hurt that was *personal*.

There's history there.

Tubbo reaches out, threading his fingers with Ranboo's, and there's a small twitch of long fingers before they curl around his with a slight chill that prickles at his neck as they squeeze down in an offer of reassurance and comfort as the countdown begins on the television and-

He leans forward, searching the screen for any hint of Quackity and Niki behind Wilbur's form as Schlatt's words raises the tension of the room and Ranboo leans just enough to brush their shoulders together.

Quackity *has* to be alive.

The death of Jester would be something Schlatt wouldn't be able to resist gloating about.

But it's also the knowledge that it means that Schlatt is plotting something with Quackity and Tubbo's nails digs into the back of Ranboo's hand, mouth twisting grimly behind his mask and-

Tubbo turns his head with the sudden motion to his right, locking gaze on Red Chaos' as his hand wraps around the handle on the axe resting on Techno's back, pulling it back with an unsteady lurch of stumbling steps away and he pauses for a second where he'd pushed to his feet instinctively because-

The former's Hero's eyes burn with a violent and gut-wrenching *desperation*, pupils pinpricks in a sea of blue as his back collides against the wall of the room, Techno's words barely seeming to register, and Tubbo is reaching for his power as Red Chaos' shoulders ripples tense, axe rising and right arm pressed tight against the wall-

And-

The noise is a sickening thing as Red twists the axe around before slamming in in a hard motion into the wall, a wet *crunch* of bone and flesh torn apart beneath the sharp blade of the Blood God.

He doesn't stop there, using the weight of his body to shove the rest of the blade clean through, arm dropping to the floor as Techno reaches for the Hero who slams his palm against his mask and then there's *teeth*.

Sharp and gleaming and metallic in the split of his mask as Techno jerks him back from the axe and those teeth sinks into his arm with a rumbling snarl from the piglin hybrid and-

Tubbo can only stare the fascination, in admiration, something like envy blossoming inside of him Sapnap's hand grabs hold, voice rising in a furious shout, because-

Red had done something Tubbo hadn't been able to do.

Freeing himself from the shackles of his weakness with blood that splatters red against the wall, the axe still buried deep, the stump of the arm on the floor a grotesque thing with a

curling of limp blue fingers with the wrap of shining silver around the wrist.

It feels almost distant, the commotion around him, words rising and Techno's fingers prying a mask of metallic teeth open with fingers that tears and fizzles as the wounds seals up almost instantly and-

Tubbo's gaze is locked on the dripping torn stump of the former Hero where there's a far too familiar sizzle, echoed by the steam where teeth had torn the Blood God's arm open.

The *understanding* of what Red Chaos *is* dawning with a widening of his eyes as those blue eyes are swallowed by red.

Copycat.

"What the fuck, Red!" Sapnap's voice is a loud thing, tangled with fear as he grabs to jerk Red Chaos' towards him with a palm that presses the mask on the man's face sharply shut, teeth slotting seamlessly away. "You know the rules-"

"What rules?" Phil interrupts, eyes on Red who is heaving for air, blood dripping from the near invisible seam in the black mask, eyes burning crimson and palm pressing against the side of his head.

"We should get out of here," Ranboo tugs at his sleeve but Tubbo can't find himself to move, feet rooted where he stands. "Something is *wrong*."

Sapnap's jaw is clenched tight, shoulders curled towards his ear.

"He's copied my power." Techno steps forward, reaching and grasping the handle of his axe to tear it out the wall, hefting it over his shoulder as he circles the back of Red Chaos' who is trembling, the pool of blood growing beside him as heavy drops falls from his steaming hand. "The question is- *how much did he copy*."

Red jerks, head snapping aside, Sapnap's hand curling tight around what remains of the stump of his arm, severed just below his elbow.

"The questions is what *didn't* he copy," Sapnap grits out furiously. "The idiot *knows* he can't bite hybrids, his body isn't meant to handle it."

As if to prove his point there's a keening bubbling noise of pain from the former Hero who arches, eyes locked blindly on the ceiling, something *rippling* through him, before the sound of tearing fabric followed and there's a snap of a *tail* that flicks blood in a red arch on the floor just before the halted steps of Techno's boots.

It sways behind him, wet with blood, drenching the tuft of blond hair at the end of it.

Tubbo can't tell what exactly gleams in Techno's eyes in that exact moment but there's a flaring of his nose, more blood dripping heavy and wet in a splatter on the floor before something *hisses*, and Sapnap swears, hands clenching down around the former Hero's bicep and-

“You two get out of here,” Eret’s voice is sharp as they step towards them, one arm stretching protectively in front of them.

“I can help,” Tubbo denies immediately. “My powers-“

“We don’t know the extent of what’s going on,” Warden interrupts, trident gripped in his hand where he stands in front of Ponk who is staring at the severed hand on the ground. “You two were invited only with the understanding that you’d leave at the first hint of danger.”

Tubbo’s shoulders tightens, straightening where he stands, but-

“We did promise,” Ranboo says in a low tight voice. “They can handle this better without us.”

I was trained for this, something inside of his protests. *I can help*.

But the words won’t leave his lips because- he wants nothing to do with Heroes or Villains, he’d promised himself he’d stay out of it.

He takes a step back, turning-

There’s a bubbling noise and Tubbo can’t help one last look back, just in time to see *bones* explode out of the stump of Red Chaos’ arm, twisting grotesquely into the shape of an arm with veins and muscles folding over it before *pink skin* stretches to cover it with a *hiss* of steam that billows white around the curling figure Red Chaos’ as a rumblings guttural noise climbs metallic and echoing through the former Hero’s voice changer.

A shiver runs down Tubbo’s back at the sight of the hunched growling figure whose red eyes *gleams* with a hunger before Ranboo gives him a last tug and he’s forced out of the room with the door closing heavily shut behind them.

Back to waiting for the outcome.

-

Tubbo reaches up, removing his mask and turning it heavily in his hands.

Schlatt stares back at him in the bones of the ram with the curling black horns and his fingers curls tight around the edges of its mocking visage.

-

Tommy feels like he’s drowning.

There’s a roar in his ears, in his mind, in his veins as his lower gum bursts with pain, something twisting out at the end of his spine with a flick of wet blood that splatters behind him and the world around him shimmers into a haze of red.

Voices crowd and clamour, laughter and teasing bleeding into a chant as the dark voice pulses with a rippling hunger through him with every drawn breath

Blood for the Blood God

It echoes, it *burns*, like a brand that erodes everything that he is and overwrites everything that makes him *Tommy*.

The rest of the world disappears around him, barely aware of the hand that curls around his bicep in a desperate grip, the face in front of him a hazy thing of a moving mouth that's too slow with the rush of adrenaline fueled *euphoria*

The stump on his arm sizzles and bubbles, liquid hot as blood drips to the ground and a mirth and hunger that's not *his* coils through his veins with the stretch of his lips behind his mask to bare teeth and tusks.

Kill

Tear them apart

Rip the bones from their flesh

How dare they touch you

Make them regret

Make them pay

The growl that rumbles in his throat is a terrible thing, his vocal chords tearing at the strain with a hiss of steam that crawls up past his lips as they heal with bubbling hotness that drips and spills down his lungs.

-

"*You* have some explaining to do after this," Techno rumbles as he yanks Sapnap away from the hunching form of Theseus whose new shining *pink* hand is curling with black nails, an echo of his own, which *he's gonna think about later*. "Help or get out," he tells the Hero who balks, fists tight at his side. "I don't care what you do, but it'll be easier if we know what we're dealing with."

Truthfully, he doesn't expect much from Sapnap. The Hero is an oddity, an *allowance*, because of Quackity, at best tolerated for the information he brings and an ally solely because of Jester but-

"It's pretty obvious isn't it," Sapnap forces out with barely held-back hostility. "He copies powers via blood and *he knows he's not supposed to fucking bite hybrids*."

"Care to share with the class as to *why*?" Techno raises an unimpressed eyebrow. "Except, you know, for the whole *tail* situation he's got going on."

It swishes behind Theseus, blood dripping from the tuft of blond hair at the very end, having torn through the back of the new pants Techno had gone out of his way to get him which *bruh*.

His own flicks in response behind him, hidden behind his cape.

“Because humans aren’t *meant* to handle hybrid instincts,” Sapnap’s gaze is wary where he’s staring at Theseus, fire flicking at his fingertips. “We grow up eased into them, learning how to handle them, but it overwhelms him and- *fuck* I’ve never seen him bite a *mob* hybrid before I don’t- I don’t know *how* he’ll respond.”

Techno exchanges a glance with Phil who has discarded his sword, wings spreading out in a snap of razor-sharp feathers that melds and blends with the softer ones as Red Chaos locks onto Warden with pinprick precision.

It would have been *easier* if Techno was *just* a mob hybrid but the way Theseus’ hand had immediately sought to press against his head-

Oh he’s losing it

Blood for the Blood-

Hush now

He’s not supposed to know

G O L D

The runt agenda is true

Mans not looking very good

L

Better pray he doesn’t have rabies

That would be awkward

So awkward-

“Oh he’s got Chat alright,” Techno rumbles with a stretch of his lips and a baring of his tusks. “They’re in a tizzy.”

Hey now

Seconded

That’s just rude

There’s a distraction to them, the pace of the voices fading in and out slowed, an underlying anticipation that makes his mouth twist.

... YOU can be suspicious

He didn’t say anything

You saw the way he looked at us!

He's not looking at us either

Eyes in the head, eyes in the head

E

Don't mind me, chugging cola and KEEPING MY MOUTH SHUT-

KEKW

He kicks the severed arm safely aside, sure that Phil would want to study the bracelet now that it had been so helpfully removed.

It rolls awkwardly beneath the couch, like a morbid dog toy.

Dog

Dog

Dog

“Warden.” Sam lifts his head up from where he’s standing very *very* still, trident grasped tightly in his hand. “He’s going after you first. You tortured him *and* you’re covered in gold. You’re prime target.”

Sam slowly inclines his head and Theseus fingers twitches, the rumbling in his chest picking up in volume, mixing with the steaming of his flesh.

Techno’s neck prickles at the sound, mouth twisting and gums aching around his tusks.

The bite mark on his arm has already healed over, leaving only the blood-stained holes in his shirt, but the fact that there had been blood drawn in the first place-

It makes him want to return the favour.

The small room isn’t optimal for fighting and Chat is unpredictable at the best of the days, volatile and clamoring in a mess of voices that drowns out reason.

Techno’s been at their mercy enough times to be intimately familiar with that helpless euphoria that comes with giving in to his very base instincts.

Don't look at us

We're chill vibes today

You're stuck with the lurkers

Don't tell him that

EH

I miss Wilbur

Yeah yeah we all miss Wilbur

Mans been jailed

Bird in a cage

L

Maybe they'll make him sing like one

“Chat,” Techno warns with a grunt.

Brotherblade

Brotherblade

Brotherblade

There’s laughter at his annoyance, cooing and teasing as he threads his way closer, watching the way the shining new pink fingers twitches and tenses.

“Don’t move,” Phil advises Sam helpfully, eyes full of gleaming curiosity that Techno huffs at as the other turns to the flame Hero. “You said he’d bitten a hybrid before.” Sappnap looks sharply to Phil, shoulders so tense that Techno *knows* he’s going to be feeling it later.

“What about it?” Defensiveness.

Oh, Techno is going to have a *fun* time with Sappnap once Theseus has been dealt with.

“The only physical tell, as far as I could see, were his *teeth*.”

Sappnap’s mouth tightens in a thin line. “How the hell do you even- I- fuck it doesn’t matter.” He snuffs out the fire at his fingers. “He’s bitten two hybrids before, that I know of at least. The first- it was before I met him, and he never shared *what* exactly it was, I just know it was something with sharp teeth.” A sharp exhale. “The second time- we had a mission that went sideways and there’s a *limit* to the time he can use the powers he copies.” It’s forced out with great reluctance.

“So, he was pushed into a situation where he ended up biting someone other than Dream to get it out of it,” Phil guesses as his wings folds against his back, quieting any rustle as he shifts his feet carefully.

Techno takes a slow step closer to Theseus who is trembling, his body wired tight with tension ready to snap.

The rumblings noise in the other’s chest calls something inside his own.

Sapnap snorts. “We found a way around that, he hasn’t been- anyway, doesn’t matter, what *does* matter is that the second time was a fucking *disaster*.”

“How so?” Phil pursues with false levity, a coaxing voice of warmth that invites to share.

Sapnap hesitates and Techno twists his axe to catch the shine meaningfully.

“He bit an avian hybrid and a first- at first we thought it was *fine*.” Sapnap’s voice is tense, short. “They didn’t have any wings, the most they’d inherited was the little-“ He gestures towards his ear. “The little feathers around the ear hole, some sort of parrot hybrid, however distantly but-“ Knuckles presses white against his skin. “Of course it couldn’t have been that easy, *it never is*, and his powers fucking- it doesn’t just *copy*.”

“You don’t say,” Techno huffs. “I’ve never regrown a limb before.” A beat of consideration. “At least I’ve never *tried*.”

Phil barks a startled laugh.

“Don’t go getting ideas,” Phil warns with clear amusement. “Go on.” He raises a brow at the flame Hero.

Sapnap let’s out a rough breath.

“Dream calls it *Adaptation*,” he forces out. “There wasn’t enough avian blood to do a complete transformation of wings but his body sure as hell *tried* and it nearly killed him and it was just-“ the Hero stands pale, shadows beneath his eyes and grim remembrance. “His body tried to make the muscles, tried to make the wings, but it just fucked him over completely instead in this strange skeletal amalgamation of twisted muscles and once- once it ran out his body *rejected it*.”

Silence.

“What do you mean with *rejected it* exactly?” Phil asks cautiously.

Sapnap let’s out a short unamused laugh. “Exactly what it sounds like. His powers are meant to take and make use of a power and then get rid of it and that’s what it *did*.” His head lowers, bitterness in the lines of his face. “The fucked up thing is that the *instincts* still remains, after, but it’s like- it’s *wrong*.” A beat. “It’s not perfect and, like you said, his teeth are sharper, that remained.” A breath. “Dream forbid him from ever biting a hybrid again.”

And that’s *interesting*.

Techno’s never heard of a power that could copy something so completely, Theseus entire system rewriting itself with the blood he’d swallowed down and-

“I don’t know what will happen,” Sapnap says with a groan as he scrubs a hand over his face. “Your powers are, no offense, a bit *fucked up* and involving *healing* in the whole thing-“

He flicks his ear.

He's never met another piglin hybrid before.

There's a shift of rolling tension from the former Hero, blood dripping from the chin of the black mask, Techno's instincts prickling because there's a *challenge* in the way the sounds twist out of Theseus' chest, prey playing at being the biggest predator in the room.

Sam's breaths are heavy and slow through the filtering of his mask where he stands, and Theseus' hand raises slowly, pink and twitching as the former Hero hunches forward with a ripple down his spine, nails dragging down the side of his hood.

"Blood." The voice is distorted, an echo that overlays with something darker, something hungrier. **"Blood for the Blood God."** The words rip at his vocal chords, a bubbling wet noise that steams and sizzles as the damage heals over.

"Oh so we're doing this the hard way," Techno huffs as Chat chitters excitedly.

E

I feel like I should... Blood for the Blood God

Blood for the Blood God

KEKW

Gotta give him points for style

Go big or go home

He stole our GOD??

hE BETTER NOT HAVE

Just borrowing it

Free real estate

L

Mans gonna have a killer headache in the morning

I think you mean toothache

LIL TUSKS

BAIBE TUSKS

Hhhhhhhhhhhh

Sobs,,,

"Get a grip, Chat," Techno mutters under his breath. "Angel-"

“Distract and grab?” Phil tips his head meaningfully. “Warden, I’m gonna need you to move on my mark, mate.”

Sam tenses to Techno’s stark amusement but then-

Red Chaos had proven himself a dangerous adversary and the ability to copy powers is something that, in the wrong hands, could be misused in far too many ways, the walls of Pandora filled with those with abilities that had been deemed too dangerous to be allowed out in society.

To have a *Hero* capable of wielding them, and someone in direct access to those exact powers-

If there’s something that’s sure it’s that Schlatt’s interest in Red Chaos has become blatantly clear and combining that with his want of Wilbur well.

And now he’d armed himself with Techno’s own ability to heal, dragging Chat along for the ride.

His fingers tightens around the handle of his axe, slowly lowering it down, Phil’s wings twitching on his back as Sam slowly shifts one foot back to a small twitch, a stilling of limbs and an abrupt quieting of the rumbling growl.

-

Destroy it.

-

The silence stretches like a halted breath.

Adrenaline, exhilaration, Phil’s lips moving as he snaps out his wings with a whistle of rippling metal, Techno’s axe clattering to the ground with a sharp noise that makes Theseus twist on the spot forward as Sam grabs hold of Ponk and shoves him forcefully towards the door, backing with quick rapid steps that rustles loud with his armour.

Theseus snarls, aggression in every line of his body, a trembling tension that threaten to *snap*.

“Hey there, mate, easy now-“ Phil’s wings spread wide in the room, black and gleaming where they cover Sam’s retreat with deliberation with a raising of his hand. “Let’s not be hasty, hm?”

Theseus rumbles a guttural noise in response, shoulders curling blood red gaze flicking between the two of them with a hiss of steam.

There’s a hunching of his shoulders, fingers spread clawed and animalistic, nothing of the man that had been edging on a breakdown just moment before left in the unnatural glow of his eyes.

Eret steps closer and Techno tenses, a rippling of *something* urging the baring of his teeth, and-

Theseus lurches towards Phil who dodges back in a quick step, snapping his wing out to clip the Hero over his head, twisting around as Theseus turns on his heel, his usual grace traded for something sharper and deadlier with black nails that folds close to aims to pierce Phil's chest and-

"Oh no you don't-" Techno grunts as he catches the back of that red hoodie, jerking it sharply back aiming to quickly sweep the Hero's feet from beneath him only.

Those red eyes meet his, too fast, too violent, and Techno barely gets his hand up to catch the fist aimed for his throat, Theseus other hand clawing rivulets down his arm before black nails sinks deep into his muscles to claw into bone in an unforgiving hold and he finds himself with muscles straining as the other forces him to take his entire weight and-

It's a split decision between going down in something terribly *undignified* or having his chin kicked in by the twisting body aiming to kick *up* and Techno choses to be third option as he jerks the arm still in his hold up, grabs the ankle, and breaks it in a clean *snap*.

Techno is well familiar with Sam's chosen techniques for interrogation and something flashes in red, a *keen* ringing wretched in the room, his instincts blaring in wild shock at the sound as his grip falters and Theseus goes down with a sprawling of limbs.

Ow

Low blow

A salute for our fallen soldier o7

o7

o7

o7

o7

"He's struggling," Phil observes keenly as Theseus scrabbles back, forcing himself up, stumbling for only a brief moment before the healed ankle settles beneath him.

Red eyes snaps up to them both.

"He's gone *feral*, there's no thinking involved," Techno huffs, his arm steaming as it sealed up. "He's just reacting."

"What kind of hybrid do you think he's bit before?" Phil asks as Eret lingers, observes, Techno's tusks aching as Theseus rumbles a noise deep in his chest.

“Would be funny if it was an actual dog,” Techno snorts distractedly as Theseus hunches low. “How long does his power borrowing usually last?”

“I don’t know,” Sappnap gets out where he’s watching, frozen, eyes wide on Theseus. “There’s- it’s never the *same*.”

“How very helpful of you,” Techno groans. “I’d rather *not* maim him now that we’re on a time crunch and he’s very conveniently healed himself up.”

Phil tips his head in consideration. “Maim him, chain him up, have him bite you again?”

“And that’s supposed to aid us in getting his cooperation *how* you imagine?”

“I’m just throwing it out there.” Phil’s eyes gleam with something that makes Techno *doubt*.

He snorts, watching carefully as Theseus shifts, tail flicking in agitation behind him with a rumble of warning and it’s-

It *itches* something at the back of his mind, a *chuff* rumbling out of his chest in response before he can stop it and-

Theseus stills, eyes locking on him, chest heaving.

A low questioning halting rumble, raising in inquiry.

Techno squints.

Chat’s silent for a long moment before-

Is... is he trying to communicate...?

This is unprecedented

New territories

Do something back

Go on

Do it

Do it

Do it

Chat hushes itself in clear anticipation, chittering just at the edge of his consciousness, giving him very much the feeling of a hoard of curious eyes peering over his shoulder.

Performance anxiety

Shh

Discomfort prickles through him.

Phil chirps, suddenly, and Theseus flinches, chirruping an odd noise with a snap of teeth behind his mask as his gaze veers between the two of them, trembling where he stands.

“Aww, he sounds like a baby chick,” Phil coos, wings shifting deliberately on his back, palms spread in front of him as he makes a low soothing warble with a rustle of soft feathers.

Theseus takes a step back, shaking his head violently, and a snarl leaves his lips, chest rumbling in warning, and Phil’s voice rises in response, his tone changing, sharper, and Techno recognizes that reproach easily enough in the pure avian sound, ancient and old.

Theseus flinches, breath quickening, steps uncoordinated and stumbling, eyes too wide in the shadows of his hoodie and there’s a single flicker of blue in the right.

“He’s going to crash,” Techno notes.

Sapnap lurches into motion but Theseus eyes are already rolling up, like the strings cut on a puppet, and taloned fingers catches and curls into the back of a red hoodie, lowering the former Hero facedown onto the floor, Phil on his haunches as he finally let’s go, and Techno can’t see his face from where he stands.

Something curls in his chest as Phil’s fingers flitters down over the pink arm, index fingers dragging with consideration.

"Well, his tail doesn't look like it's falling off anytime soon and the arm looks like it's there to stay but we'll keep an eye on it," Phil hums as he straightens out. “Eret-“

“They told me nothing about it.” Eret looks up from the sprawled form of Red Chaos, eyes impossible to read behind the sunglasses. “Whatever Dream and Schlatt is up to it’s being very closely kept.”

“Is it possible you can get another visit to Pandora?” Techno shifts, stepping closer to Theseus, past Sapnap whose hands are curling and uncurling.

“I can,” Sapnap interrupts before Eret can respond. “I know- I know someone who can get me in.”

Techno gives him a look, head tilting, mouth curling to flash teeth.

“Oh, you and I are going to have a *conversation* before you go *anywhere*. ”

Chapter End Notes

Hhhhh we're not even at the end of the second arc, there's so much to go on this journey, but I present to you- a POV shift. Which was an absolute pain. And I can't wait to get

back to Tommy and him dealing with the aftermath next chapter because that's where the *interesting* bits are about to go down bcs, oh boi, mans in for a time.

But this POV shift to Tubbo and Techno were both very important so here they are sfhksjhf.

Extra thanks to Flustered who helped me figure out the instincts stuff this chapter and just for being a wonderful friend<3

This chapter was a murder to tie together and my brain is tired but :D gotta drop this at you guys and let it be what it is.

Much love from me to you<3

-

If you're interested there's a [Hush Now Discord](#) that tends to go *brrrr* with the theories in designated channels and also have a lot of fun chatter and chill people on top of scoops of chaos with my lovely mods<3

You can find me on **tumblr** here: [corpse-art](#)
And I'm also on **twitter** now here: [corpsey_art](#)

I post a one hour countdown on all my social medias for a new chapter update if you're interested in such a thing :)

-

DUDES. We have new Hush Now art!! They're all amazing. Go and give them all so much love<3

(And if I ever miss linking your art- pls let me know!! I try to make sure I keep track of everything but I am but human)

[YES/NO chop chop by PlantChecker](#) art

[Losing my Mind by CyanFerret](#) art

[I've had this child- by Eliot_Beeteller](#) art

[Snapshots of 31 by owlwinter8](#) art

[Grumpy Child by Lliwful](#) art

[End of the Line by SquirrelViolent](#) art

[C'mon Theseus by In_fernal_MC](#) art

[Wolf and Raccoon by munch_neko](#) art

[Blood for the Blood Child by syrrensong](#) art

[Distorted Violence by jazztheavian](#) art

[Piglin Tommy by ecliptic_arts](#) art

[FANART MASTERPOST](#)

Chapter 33

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

His body feels heavy, sluggish, an ache that wires into his very bones, seeping into his blood, twining like barbs through his skin with an oversensitivity that leaves him far too aware of himself.

As if he's nothing more than an open jagged bleeding wound left bare on display.

He twists with a vision that dances hazy red around him, sinking fangs deep and gnawing on his heart with a curling of too sharp teeth and a rumble that sounds wrong, too heavy in his chest.

Violence that isn't his pounds with every hard beat of his heart and there's a hunger that roots itself deep, like a parasitic void inside of him.

There are consequences for everything, Child

The voice vibrates down to his very bones, heavy and old, *knowing* where it wraps around him with a rumble.

There's a feeling of a hand, too big where it settles against the curve of his jaw, his eyes snapping open to meet red and-

He forgets how to breath, lungs ceasing the motion as he stares up at something ancient and inhuman, the details beyond him, golden catching at the edges of his vision, wraps of black and white, and hair that spirals long and darkly crimson, wild, above silly notions of gravity.

What stands out starkly are the antlers curling shining and golden to wrap like a crown around their head.

There's a heaviness to the air, pressing down on him, wrapping around him in a suffocating embrace.

He's looking at a God.

Those were not your powers to wield

The hand's ghostly touch slides of his face and the world spins in a whirlwind around him, his arms crossing over his face in a protective shield and-

Tommy finds himself momentarily suspended in nothingness before a world of red flowers broadens out beneath him and he's dropped down amidst red poppies, barely remembering to catch himself with a stumble of his steps.

“You’re-“ He sucks a breath that feels too heavy in his chest, as if the very air had turned leaden where it spills down his throat to expand his lungs. “You’re the Blood God.”

At least you are not a fool

His vision pounds the closer he tries to look on the God and he ends up turning his head, looking at the world that spans around him, dark, the sky lacking any sort of stars, a single tree in the midst of the red field, white, and there’s something-

There’s a figure beneath the tree, leaning against the trunk of it, adorned and crowned in gold.

They look like they’re sleeping, head lowered and soft pastel pink hair draping down over the heavy armour, decorated like a warrior of old with a finely made axe resting in their lap. Misplaced in the large field of red drenched flowers it rests, vines wrapping delicately up their limbs, poppies swaying in an invisible breeze.

A heavy metal sword blocks his sight and he jerks violently back, bare feet trampling the flowers, strangely sticky beneath the curling of his toes in the earthy ground, heart pounding and nausea rising in his gut.

“That’s-“ It’s a realization that settles with a twisting of his guts. “That’s Techn-“

He’s mine

There’s an easy kind of finality to the words that echoes around him despite the wide-open space, crawling into his ears and pooling inside his mind, impossible to escape.

He serves me willingly, little human, don’t be so fretful on his behalf

Amusement, but wrong, his jaw clenching at the liquid echo of it inside of him.

He knew very well what he was getting himself into, swearing himself to me

“Why-“ He licks his suddenly dry lips, all too aware of how small he is here, feet cold in a world that feels to real around him but all too aware that this- it has to be the Blood God’s domain. “Why am I here?”

You know why you’re here, Child

A cold shiver crawls down his back, stepping back with a wet slide of his foot and-

He draws a breath that smells rank of death, bile in his throat as the Blood God lowers down and poppies part beneath a withered black foot, golden markings glowing against what little skin Tommy sees before he’s forced to avert his vision or risk throwing up right there and then.

He’s not so sure the God would appreciate it and he has a feeling he’s already in deep shit.

It’s an entertaining power

To drink the blood of your enemies

To make their powers yours

The voice of the God bleeds into his very mind, sinking like claws that tears at his brain, inescapable even as his palms presses desperately over his ears.

A breath, an inhalation that ripples with the God's hunger inside of him, legs trembling beneath him, struggling to just keep himself standing in the presence that wraps all-consuming around him, unable to move as a hand reaches out to curl, one finger after another, around his throat.

It burns.

You're not mine, Blood Child

A breath that smells of rot and death.

But for a moment you were

Possessiveness, deep and heavy, threatening to tear him apart as he yanks one hand up, tearing down into skin that won't give away to the curling black claws, eyes wide and desperate as fingers tightens, locked in a sea of red that looks right through him, flaying him bare.

"I'm sorry-" Tommy chokes out. "I didn't *know*-" The hand tighten, cutting off his words in a wet bubbling wheeze.

You humans and your excuses

Your lack of knowledge doesn't erase the consequences of your decision

Dark amusement bleeds into his veins, a wet desperate breath torn from his throat.

You are a strange little thing

Clinging so desperately to what was

His visions dances with white spots, something squirming beneath his flesh like wet worms as the ancient being leans closer, warm breath spilling over his face and watering his eyes.

This is my domain

It's only meant for me and mine

You do not belong here

Desperation for air, for survival, deeply ingrained has his lips curling back in a breathless snarl and the amusement that floods through him threatens to drown him.

But you're in luck

The hand loosens and he falls, sinking to his knees before the God.

I am feeling merciful

Tommy coughs, sucking gasped leaden breaths desperately down his lungs.

I accept your offering, this time, Blood Child

Tommy's world is *red*, hands buried in poppies that drips with blood from once white petals and stains his palms, fingers buried in something warm and wet that twists his stomach with a rising bile.

The God lowers itself on one knee that sinks into the rot and blood, between the half-buried bones of a ribcage, hands spanning out to wrap around the wrist of his right arm, lifting it up, cradling it in a wrap of too long fingers.

But next time you think to drink from the vessel of the Blood God

Be sure to know that the price might be far more than you wish to pay

A horrible noise tears itself out of his mouth as he feels something wrap white hot where the power dampener had rested, golden light swallowing his vision.

Let's see what you can do, Whelp

-

Tommy snaps awake, fingers clawing down desperately on his mask, barely getting it off as he leant over the edge of the bed, vomiting in a retching cough of bile and blood, drenched in sweat that cling cold to his skin as he heaves desperately for air.

It seeps cool down his aching throat to expand his lungs in staccato breaths as he stares down at the pool of inky red splatters with a curling of his stomach, blinking wetly through his blurry vision.

Saliva drips from his open mouth, trembles running violently through him as he drops his head down, forehead dragging against the mattress as he slowly, painfully, curls around himself with a hiccupped sob.

-

Is he dead?

He looks dead

Someone should poke him

He breathes in.

Would be kinda awkward if we're haunting a dead body

Breathes out.

I didn't sign up for this

You mean you signed something?

L

Can't believe we're still stuck here

"Shut up," Tommy bites out with a harsh exhale. "You're not helping."

With that, your angst party?

Pity party for one

KEKW

Mans just grew a whole arm

And a tail

And he's busy sulking in bed

What a joyless existence

What a wretch

What an ungrateful child

Tommy snarls, twisting and slinging his pillow into the wall with heaving breaths, fury burning through his veins, a bitter sort of helplessness twining heavy in his heart as the voices chitter with mockery.

"You can- fucking call me *ungrateful* all you want but just because- just because your *God* is a fucking *basic bitch*-"

There's a cry out immediate outcry and Tommy allows himself a moment of vitriolic gratification.

The Blood God doesn't allow just anyone to wield his powers

The last voice echoes heavier, weight in the finality of it, almost chiding.

"Yeah, well, I don't care," he forces out with a tense jaw. "So you can all fuck off."

We're waiting to

Queued up all prettily

"Leave faster."

Ungrateful child

Ungrateful child

Ungrateful child

“At least be fucking creative if you’re gonna clutter up my brain,” Tommy snarks, shifting his right hand behind him with a curl of fingers as a tremble runs through him. “It’s all just *memememe* oh we’re so grand serving our vampire asshole wannabe-god with soup for brains-“

The outrage is like a balm to his soul.

You’re lucky our God accepted your sacrifice

He would have torn you apart

Knotted and hung you from your own intestines

Broken your ribcage open and bare to devour your heart

He clenches his jaw tight.

Silly child

Playing with powers far beyond your understanding

So young

Too young

Perhaps just young enough

Gutsy enough to cut off your arm

Lucky enough that it made Him curious

Blood for the Blood God

The voices cooes mockingly at him when he winces, remembering all too well the blur of red haze that had swallowed up his sanity, blood on his tongue, spilling hot and wet down his throat.

“What even *are you?*” he demands in frustration, confusion, a blearily sort of disbelief.

We are His

We are Nothing

We are Everything

We're all in your mind Child

Mockery that digs deep, chittering voices that rises and falls in volume, layering oddly inside his mind.

Lucky child

Born under a cursed star

We've been told to give you a message

Before we leave

All you have to do is listen

Anticipation, impatience, a feeling of too many eyes looking at him as his fingers curls into covers.

It was allowed this time

You surprised Him

You entertained Him

But try to wield His power again

And you will not like the consequences

Ice crawls down his spine, head pounding and bile rising in his throat.

We are bound by His rules

We are bound not to interfere

Your secrets are yours

Lucky child

Cursed child

An amalgamation of pieces

How much of you will remain at the end?

-

"Be careful to not draw the attention of Gods," Bad had once cautioned them both, Dream's step halting at the door and Tommy's head craning fully ahead, strawberry sucker in his mouth. *"There are few who remain in today's society and those that do-"* A beat of hesitation from the demon, long ropy tail flicking behind him. *"Nothing good ever comes from it."*

Tommy hadn't understood then, not fully.

He remains in the aftermath of it all, the Blood God gone, but his touch having left a mark on his very soul.

-

Life goes on.

Only, it doesn't feel quite that easy.

Tommy lies awake long after the last voice has faded from his mind with a mocking little bid of adieu, fingers dug so deep into the pillow clutched against his head that they're trembling from the strain.

All ten of them.

His stomach is so knotted up he feels nauseous, his head pounding, ghostly echoes of a hunger that isn't his coiling through his veins with a violence that pounds with the beating of his heart that twists wretched with too much.

He remembers the joy, Wilbur's arm around his shoulder as their voices raised in a holler over snow and ice, amidst a world enveloped by tall trees rustling green with pines even in the winter.

The cold around him, the warmth of the man's side as he was brought close, their breaths misting as they shouted until their voices grew hoarse-

"THIS IS OUR POGTOPIA!"

The nails on his right-hand tears through the fabric of the pillow.

A tiny, childish part of him whispers *it's not fair*.

He feels lost.

There's no room to sneak into the middle of the night on careful quiet steps, crawling beneath covers with minimal rustling, breathing out only when he'd settled down with a curling of his spine against Dream's only for his mentor to, only moments later, throw an arm around him and drag him close with a sleepy huff against his hair.

There's no Wilbur waiting for him under the porch light, snow clinging to the curls of his brown hair, wearing that ridiculous dusty brown coat and with a curling of his lips in a helpless sort of smile that deepens the lines of his face, broad and visible for all to see.

Wilbur who was Siren.

Who had been warm beneath him when he curled desperately around him, red flaring around them both as Tommy pushed back with Dream's own powers, his mentor's blood on his tongue as he protected the very man he'd sought to kill.

Guilt.

Relief.

Two very different warring emotions, a sickening churning in his gut where he lies hidden beneath his covers like a cowardly child.

Something curls against his leg and he flinches, breath too sharp, too loud and he squeezes his eyes shut with a shudder that runs through him and-

It's a tensing of muscles, covers thrown off and torn pillow violently discarded as he gets to his feet, bare against the cold floor, heaving for air through his mask as he stumbles his way towards the bathroom, sweat beading on his brow, stomach twisting-

He claws his mask off with desperate fingers and his knees hits the floor, retching on nothing but bile, acidic on his tongue as he leans heavily against the toilet seat.

He shivers, cold, right arm loose beside him and left curling against his chest as he collapses back.

Stares blearily up at the mirror above the sink and the bright fluorescent light.

"What does it say about the man you miss when you're drawn to all the ugly sides of me? I'm not a good person, Tommy. I am human, flawed, perhaps in more ways than most."

His head hits the bathroom wall with a dull *thunk*.

"I know what I'm like... and that's the issue."

"I," Tommy laughs wetly. "I have fucking *issues*."

It's strange to hear his own voice, free of voice modulator after the two weeks spent in Warden's-

In *Sam's*-

He stomach twists but there's nothing more to throw up, he's running on empty, his body pushed beyond reason, and he knows it.

Biting Blood God-

Biting *Techno*-

It's a fucking mockery of a mess he's gotten himself into and now he sits, tail limp on the floor, and-

"Remember Pogtopia-"

A bitter part of him wants to be angry Wilbur, wants to twist himself into knots to blame it all on him, to rationalize it all as a rotten lie but-

He can't.

It's a helpless sort of feeling that spreads through him because it can't all have been a lie, it *can't*, Tommy-

He can't-

"He's my friend." The words sound small, frail. "Wilbur... *Wilbur is my friend.*"

He sits on the bathroom floor in the Syndicate hideout, the sleeve of his hoodie flaking with dried blood where the axe had gone through his arm and-

What about Siren?

He flinches, fingers curling tight, nail black and sharp where they press into the skin of his palm, a colour that bleeds down to stain the skin on the tips of his fingers, a physical reminder of the Blood God now anchored permanently to his body.

He raises his left hand, pressing down against his teeth, feeling the two small pinpricks of tiny tusks against trembling fingers.

Closes his mouth, pressing the soft intention of them down against his skin, harder yet with the clenching of his jaw.

He drags them out, teeth scraping against his nails and hand falling limp beside him.

Wilbur isn't supposed to be Siren.

But he is.

And-

The Angel of Death, whose feathers had buried deep into his skin, who had taught him to cook, is also Phil who had smiled as he invited him to make morning pancakes with an easy laugh and a crinkle of his eyes.

The Blood God, who had split Dream's mask and scarred his face, who had bled on his couch and eaten his shitty noodles, is also Techno who had taken him out to see Carl, warm and steady behind him as he taught Tommy how to stroke his hand down the coat of the horse.

"*They're human, just like you and me,*" Dream had remarked in the aftermath of their first run in with Blood God and Nemesis when Tommy had been leaning over him, frowning at the delicate stitches as he carefully smeared it down with gel that was supposed to help with the scarring.

Dream had denied any help of Healers with it, something shadowed in his eyes, gaze distant even with Tommy right there in front of him.

"Nemesis said it was a message for you."

"*She did?*" Dream hadn't sounded surprised, head turning and hands curling tight in the covers. "*I suppose that's one thing you could call it.*"

Tommy...

Tommy doesn't think he'd been quite ready for *just how human*.

His tail flicks and he turns his head to give it a baleful look where it lies flat on the floor, thin and long and *pink* with a tuft of blond hair at the very end.

Well, maybe not *human* but it's the fucking *sentiment* of it.

It makes a small twitch, dragging over the cold floor, and it's fucking *weird* that he can feel it.

Dream had pushed him over and over on the dangers of biting hybrids and Tommy still remembers that first time, the feeling of blood in his mouth, curled up as his molars was forcefully expelled from his gums, something sharper growing in their space and-

He'd been six, unable to understand what was happening to him.

It had been a bite out of self-defense, a tussle with a hybrid that had gotten out of hand with blood in the snow and Tommy victorious for all but five seconds before his nails had pierced right through the can of soup, the cold liquid spilling and mixing with the red dripping from his torn nailbeds as he sunk to his knees with paling cheeks and falling smile.

The pain had crawled down his spine, had twisted with a tail tearing out of the end of his spine only to rot and fall out less than an hour later as Tommy laid curled up, convinced he was dying in the dirty alley.

Carnassial teeth, Dream had called them the first time Tommy showed him, nine and scowling at the feeling of curious fingers in his mouth.

It was what had led him to meeting Bad in the first place, Dream's worry clear when he discussed Tommy's powers with the ancient demon, because the teeth had stayed when the tail had *not*.

He wishes he had Dream now, to explain, to tell him that *things will be okay*.

He draws a breath.

Because he doesn't.

And him having a fucking *pity party* on the bathroom floor-

It won't do shit and he *knows it*.

Move, he thinks to himself. *Get over yourself.*

He draws a ragged breath, eyes drifting to the mask discarded on the floor and-

Tommy slumps forward, reaching for it, turning it carefully in his hands to stare down at it—such an innocent design at first glance, black and shining metallic, a near invisible seam over the mouth, the latch easy enough to find with a press of his thumb and it opens it up.

A small jerk of his thumbs in the back slot of the jaw releases the teeth, metallic and sharp in an animalistic grin.

“Your mongrel is well trained, Dream.”

“Tell him, Dream, tell your little dog what you told me before they turned up here.”

He turns the mask slowly around, thumb finding and releasing the small slot where two capsules rests innocently.

“They call you Dream’s dog, a bitch and a mutt in the same breath, but loyalty doesn’t come easily in the world of Heroes and Villains.”

He picks one up, turning it to catch the bright fluorescent light through the red of Dream’s blood.

“Red Chaos, all alone and fumbling, nothing more than a dog without its owner.”

“What a miserable thing you’ve been reduced to.”

One hand pale, scarred, the other pink, fingers longer, nails dark and sharp.

He’s never felt further away from understand who or what he is.

-

Tommy peels his ruined hoodie off and scrubs the bloody torn sleeve in the sink, the motions strange, muscles rippling *differently* beneath the pink skin in a way that makes him twitchy with every back-and-forth motion until he has to stop, his breathing too fast and heart pounding loudly in his ears.

His fingers curls trembling as he yanks it out of sight and-

When he looks at himself in the mirror it’s a familiar stranger that stares back at him, tusks small but visible where they’d pushed up to replace his lower canines, rounded oddly at the base.

They’re nothing like Blood God’s large jutting ones, just fucking *baby ones*, and he doesn’t know what to feel or think about it.

They look out of place, unfamiliar, his hair a bedraggled wet mess of knotted hair on his head and face drained of colour, washed out in a way that he resents.

He’s lost weight but the bruises had faded from his body with the first swallow of Techno’s blood, the healing power fizzling around him like steam and then-

Hunger.

Tommy blows a harsh breath.

He feels lethargic, like he's come out of a bad hangover, and he lifts his left hand to scrub it roughly against his cheek in a vain attempt to bring some colour back to it.

He lifts his right arm, turning it carefully to stare at the golden wrap of a crown of antlers circling his wrist, jutting sharp and dangerous and yet strangely delicate, a claim and a brand alike from the Blood God.

It feels like a warning.

It feels like a promise.

It feels like a *challenge*.

He flexes his fingers tryingly, struggling with the sense of disconnect from unfamiliar fingers.

Schlatt had said a week.

Tommy is running out of time.

But he's got his powers back and-

He knows something the Syndicate doesn't.

He lifts his head and narrows his eyes at his mirror image, tail swishing back and forth behind him, lips curling to bare teeth and tiny tusks.

"I can't believe I got myself attached to *two* idiots."

-

Footsteps, Tommy halting his pacing as he turns, attention sharply on the rustle of locks.

His stomach twists, shoulders hunching and chin raising as the door opens up and Techno steps inside, cloak heavy on his shoulders and crown sharp jutting spikes of gold on his head.

Things have changed, Tommy thinks with a twisting of his lips behind his mask as red eyes meets his with an itching of something unfamiliar in his chest, tail flicking sharply. *Fucking bring it on.*

Chapter End Notes

And- with that I am officially ending the second arc!

And we enter our third and final one. Which is gonna be long so- we have a fair bit ahead of us my guys but I think this is a good place to end the second one on so :)

Tommy is learning that actions have consequences and they're not very fun at all and things are about to get messy with the next chapter.

I hope you guys are all having a wonderful evening wherever you are<3

-

If you're interested there's a [Hush Now Discord](#) that tends to go *brrrr* with the theories in designated channels and also have a lot of fun chatter and chill people on top of scoops of chaos with my lovely mods<3

You can find me on **tumblr** here: [corpse-art](#)
And I'm also on **twitter** now here: [corpsey_art](#)

I post a one hour countdown on all my social medias for a new chapter update if you're interested in such a thing :)

-

DUDES. We have new Hush Now art!! They're all amazing. Go and give them all so much love<3

(And if I ever miss linking your art- pls let me know!! I try to make sure I keep track of everything but I am but human)

[Full Transformation by_ghostwink](#) art

[Bird Robbed of His Wings by__Solo_uwu](#) art

[Hush Now bookedit by_girlboss-medea](#) art

[Chop chop by_kathyrealmstales](#) art

[Carl as Pinkie Pie by_MochaBunniez](#) art

[Hush Now Snowglobe by_neccodealer](#) art

[Hush Now by_liakunemui](#) art

[Grumpy Child by_Lliwful](#) art

[Gremlin by_SquirrelViolent](#) art

[THIS IS OUR POGTOPIA \(Furby\) by_DomdomDraka](#) art

[Piglin Tommy by_mothlampss](#) art

[Hush Covers by_jinglnotfound](#) art

[Siren by _Solo_uwu](#) art

[FANART MASTERPOST](#)

Chapter 34

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Red is a lucky colour.”

It’s one of those throw away phrases Dream had told him, perhaps in passing, and while there’s no particular reason as to why Tommy found himself drawn to the colour it had perhaps served to endear him to it.

It crosses his mind strangely now, echoing with the wrap of Dream’s voice as the red regal cape on Techno’s shoulders brushes against the back of the tall boots on his feet with a rustle as the man steps into the room, door closed shut with the firm press of a palm with a lingering look before he shifts to lean back against the wall with a crossing of arms.

Those red eyes drifts down to his arm, to the wrap of a golden crown of twisted antlers around his wrist, left bare with the torn, still wet, ends of his ruined sleeve, and Tommy doesn’t understand the look in those eyes.

Wilbur’s brother.

The words are important, still, despite everything.

The Techno that had taken him out to see his horse hadn’t been this tall, just a few inches or so over his own 6’3, not a *whole fucking head taller*. And the eyes had been more of a muddy mix of brown and red, almost *maroon*, nothing like the sharp gleaming crimson that regards him quietly now, muscles lean and hard. His face had been finer, ears sharp, tusks closer to the small ones poking up at his own lower gums, skin pale and not pink, *pretty*, but-

Tommy stands with a tail twisting out at the end of his spine, flicking back and forth behind him against his will, and a pink arm that’s not his but *is*, and he’s beyond questioning it.

“I see you got to keep it.” The voice is a rumble, darker, but he thinks he can pick out the wryness of Techno’s in the voice of the Blood God and it makes his tail twitch. “The gold suits you.”

Inside the domain of the *actual* Blood God there had been a body resting against the tree in the midst of the field of poppies, pale pink hair falling down slim shoulders and flowers twining up the unmoving figure.

Idly, Tommy wonders who is the real Techno.

If there even is such a thing.

“Your God,” Tommy says, carefully tasting the words. “Is a *bitch*.”

It feels good, somehow, a giddy sort of reclaim of control, the undercurrent of warmth licking in the depth of his chest, and the familiar feeling of his powers lurking just beneath his skin a heady thing.

Techno's mouth curls beneath the pink of the boar mask, gold gleaming distractingly around the base of his tusks, something Tommy lingers on with a twitch of his fingers.

"You met him." It's not a question.

"Met him, spoke to him, nearly vomited in his field of flowers and rot." Tommy's teeth bares behind his mask. "You should speak to him about redecorating the place, it's rather miserable."

The memory of the God's touch is a physical thing, a prickling of heat against his wrist, as if in warning.

Tommy ignores it with a curling of his fingers.

"It's not everyday one meets a God." Techno pushes away from the wall, cape brushing at the back of his boots with a quiet rustle. "Did you enjoy the experience?" the Villain wonders a dark sort of rumble that thrums through his veins and-

There's something inside of him that locks hyperaware of the other as he steps into his bubble, pupils dilating with an itching of his gums as Techno steps closer, towering above him, mouth moving and-

The noise that leaves his throat is a thing of warning, shrinking back, something clawing in a jumble as his nose flares and-

Fuck.

Tommy slaps his hands over his ears with a sucked breath, shoulders drawing up as a tremble runs through him, wrestling for control with nails that digs into his hood with a furious snap of his teeth, eyes scrunching shut because-

It's not just one kind of instinct flaring up, a jumbled mess of remains from the bird and the one before that hisses in warning with puffed up fur at the predator in his space and-

Stop it, he thinks desperately to the scrambled parts of him, mouth parting behind his mask with a low noise he cannot make sense of as it bubbles up with a rough twist of his vocal chords and the taste of blood in the back of his throat.

It's the urge to shrink, it's the urge to puff up, to make himself bigger, to scare him away, to **challenge** and-

He forces his eyes open, desperately searching out the boots of the Villain, *further away now*, and he focuses on that, heart thrumming inside of his chest with wet heavy beats, breathing harsh and whistling with the gritting of his teeth.

"Fuck," he grits out with a feeling. "I forgot how- fucking messed up my brain gets."

“Sapnap told us you keep the instincts.” It’s a curious kind of lilt to the Villain’s voice and Tommy blinks the spots out of his vision. “But that they weren’t quite *right*.”

“Hell if I know,” Tommy forces out. “I’m not hybrid, I don’t exactly have a frame for what they’re *supposed* to be.” He cautiously raises his gaze, trailing up black pants, a fine dress shirt, the white fur trim at the edges of the red cape and the *golden* clasp that makes his head snap up at the *hunger* that blossoms almost painful, locking at the nose of the pink boar mask. “Wearing a lot of gold there,” he wheezes a bit painfully.

There’s a snort from the other.

“How much do you know about piglins?” Techno asks him as Tommy shoves at the parts of him that wants nothing more than to look up where he knows a golden shimmering crown rests on top of the man’s head with a whine that he refuses to give voice to.

“Not- much,” he gets out with a tongue that feels thick in his mouth. “It’s not exactly a lot of info laying around on mob hybrids, and a lot of it is just plain bad info.”

Techno hums with consideration. “At least you’re smart enough to recognize that.”

“Thanks,” Tommy gets out, tone rising in pitch. “Why the fuck is it so-“

He raises a hand and scrubs it furiously over his eyes with a groan, turning away with a rough shaking of his head, like a dog.

“I spent a whole month following Dream trying to- to fucking *preen his bloody hair* or whatever last time.” He stares despairingly at the wall, flexing his fingers in memory. “Fucking-“

The *gleam* catches at the very edge of his vision and his hand snaps out, folding around it and drawing it close to his chest with a wild-eyed look up at the Villain as he feels the still warm metal in his hand.

Techno lifts a hand in response, wiggling his fingers, his pinkie bare of the ring that had rested there.

Tommy pries his hand open, looking down at the *gold* in the palm of his pink hand, a simple thing with a ruby that rests in an elegant wrap and-

A strange noise rumbles in the depth of his chest, a pleased *chuff* he can’t help as he turns it, studying the gentle careful sheen, thumb dragging over the stone a bit distractedly as he admires the fine making of it and-

“Put it on,” a low voice close to him urges and Tommy obeys without question, letting it slip over his index with a lazy blink as he admires it. “That,” the voice continues as his senses climbs back, “is something we call gold fever.” There’s something he doesn’t understand in the eyes of the Villain as he looks up, blinking twice. “You back?”

Tommy feels heat crawl up his cheeks and ears, fingers curling, feeling the press of the metal as he does.

“Thank you,” he gets out a bit grudgingly as he ducks his head. “Is- you wear a lot of gold-“ he gets out a bit haltingly.

A low sound, something Tommy recognizes a bit startled as a laugh. “Don’t worry, you don’t have to deck yourself out in gold, just make sure to keep something on you won’t lose easily in a fight.” Techno’s fingers brushes against his wrist, almost as if reassurance, and Tommy remembers the wrap of a golden bracelet with the emerald he’d seen all those weeks ago.

He looks down at the ring, thumb rubbing slowly against it.

The lines are blurring. Perhaps they have been since he first stepped into the Hero scene, confronted by a world of misery and demand, part of a system that relies on favours between enemy and friend.

They’re not your friends.

He looks up at the Villain, at the man who’d taken him out of Warden’s hand, not out of kindness but because he had use. Something Tommy understands, in that kind of twisted way that comes with their professions where morality is a thing that slips between the cracks.

It’s not forgiveness, exactly.

It’s not hatred, either.

Stuck somewhere between the miserable pieces of him torn between Dream and Wilbur.

Hero and Villain.

His mentor and his friend.

And-

He breathes in.

“Take me to the Angel,” he demands as Techno’s mouth opens, cutting off any response. “I don’t know what the hell Schlatt is up to but I refuse to sit on the sidelines and watch things go down.” He can’t afford it, not after *everything*. “I have the ability to copy the power of any blood I swallow.”

“So Sapnap told us,” Techno says wryly.

The reminder of Sapnap makes his gums itch, something achingly close to hurt beneath the jagged bits of anger he clings to flaring up before he pushes it down.

“Yeah well, I’m not good on my own.” It’s an admittance that he loathes but true all the same. “I was only useful as Red Chaos *because* of Dream.” They observe each other, former-Hero and Villain. “I have my powers back but I need a way to use them.”

“You need *someone* you mean,” Techno observes, a glimmer of interest in his eyes, nose flaring as he inhales. “You’re offering to work with us?”

Something violent flares through him before he forces it down with a sharp flick of his tail.

“Yeah,” he gets out, and it tastes like acid on his tongue. “That’s exactly what I’m offering.”

-

It’s not a perfect plan, but it’s the only one he has.

“Giving up is the same as death.” Dream’s eyes are bright in his memories, adrenaline pounding through them both as Tommy pushed to his feet, blood dripping warm from his fingers as he reached for the familiar hot wrap of power with a stubborn clenching of his teeth. *“But you already know that, don’t you, Tommy?”*

Things are crumbling around him, Dream and Wilbur pitted on opposite sides of the field, and Tommy doesn’t know where he stands anymore.

What he does know that is that the Syndicate has use for him.

And Tommy is going to use them right back.

There’s Enforcers in the Pit, Schlatt is plotting, Dream at his heel, and Heroes are picking sides while the Syndicate prepares to get Siren back.

And Tommy is going to be on that playing field once everything goes down.

By any means necessary.

-

What Tommy doesn’t acknowledge is the itching urge to bury his nails deep and tear into the flesh of the arm that feels heavier than his left, a strange disconnection and a ghostly itch of phantom pain where the axe had torn through his flesh, severing it.

It’s not there.

But it is.

The tail is long and ropy thin behind him and he has to keep conscious track of it to keep it from tangling his feet.

He’s already tripped twice while pacing, something that had flared his cheeks red with mortification, with frustration, relieved that, at least there had been no one around to see it as he forced his aching limbs up only to sprawl back with a huff.

Instincts crowd in the back of his mind, a jumbled volatile *mess* he can’t anticipate.

He has a week to adjust to it.

He has a week to adjust to a lot of fucking shit but he can do it.

He can.

He has to.

I'm fine.

I'm alive.

They need me.

He wants to bury his head under water and scream until his voice is hoarse and he stops feeling like he's being torn in two.

I'm fine.

It's a lie.

But no one needs to know that other than Tommy.

-

"If we're going to be working together I should, like, give you a nickname." Tommy trots at Techno's side down the long winging hallways, ears trained on the rustle of the chain of the handcuffs still hanging from Techno's belt but resolutely ignoring them.

There's an anxious thrum of energy inside of him, a strange mix of adrenaline, anticipation and dread.

No going back now.

Perhaps, he'd already passed the moment of no return the moment he met Wilbur at Sam's café.

He doesn't know anymore.

"Bird feathers, phantom touch and bloody tusks look- you saved the life of Siren, there has to be something you can use there, everyone knows how honour bound the Syndicate is and you- you paid with everything."

Chronos words rings through his mind, the feverish sort of desperation and mania to the words.

"You need to dig into the Hero commission."

Tommy draws a breath.

"Like, no offence, but the Blood God is kinda a mouthful, and now that I've met the *actual* Blood God it feels a bit awkward, big man."

Technoblade, that was what Wilbur had exclaimed with Tommy hanging over Techno's shoulder, a wild sort of desperation in his eyes at the top of the stairs.

“What about *Blade*?” Tommy suggests with a personal grin behind his mask, staring resolutely ahead even as he feels eyes on him. “In honour of your axe blade kinda, you know, being the reason I looped my arm off and grew a new one in your likeness. A real bonding experience between the two of us.”

“I don’t care, *Theseus*.” The Villain’s voice is short, eyes sliding away from him. “Do as you wish.”

-

There’s admiration, a strange sort of envy for the easy way Wilbur tells him that he loves his brother.

He remembers his own lingering looks on Dream’s back, his mentor who keeps him closer than anyone else, and yet Tommy is all too aware of the distance between them.

“I’ll protect you.”

“I’m proud of you.”

He holds the words close to his heart, reaching out, Dream reaching back, pulling him to his feet with a stumble of tired feet and a relieved slump against his mentor’s shoulder as he breathes out in a shuddering exhale after a long training lesson.

There’s words Tommy wishes he’d told Dream, tucked close to his chest, hollowed out and rotten inside his heart where he’d carved their place where Dream would never hear them.

~~*You mean everything to me.*~~

~~*You’re like a brother to me.*~~

~~*I love you.*~~

~~*Please, don’t leave me behind.*~~

-

He thinks of Wilbur.

Silent, where no one can see the clenching of his fingers in his lap, he wonders-

Do you regret hurting me now that you know who I really am?

~~*Will you still look at me and see your Tommy?*~~

-

“You want to help.” The Angel of Death’s eyes linger on him where he stands. “How can I take your word for it?”

“You can’t,” Tommy says bluntly, taking a daring step forward. “You know I’m Dream’s dog, loyal to a fault, or so they say.” He grimaces behind his mask because, the truth is not so simple anymore. “And you’ve made it no secret what you think of me.” Black wings, a rustle of danger and an omen of death where they spread dark and sleek behind the man, eyes shadowed by the brim of his hat as he leans forward with clasped hands. “But you know as well as I do that if you’re going to challenge the very Hero Society I’m an asset you want on your side.”

“I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but the majority of the Syndicate is made up of hybrids.” The Angel’s eyes are a lingering thing of too much attention. “And your powers don’t appear too useful with those.”

“You’re the *Syndicate*. You’re telling me you don’t have access to any sort of superpowered blood that *isn’t* of hybrid nature?” It’s a challenge, the best he can make, even as fear curls through him like an itch beneath his skin because he *needs* to be useful.

Techno snorts. “He’s got us there.”

“I’ll tell you- I’ll tell you what I can,” Tommy tries stubbornly. “I can’t- I can’t tell you fucking *everything* but I can do my best to be, I don’t know, truthful to a *point*.” He stares into blue eyes, willing the man to see the earnestness of it. “An equal trade because I’m sick and tired of being left in the dark of things.” He reaches to rub against his neck as it prickles with a snap of his teeth. “I was a Hero for two years and I worked side-by-side with the Number One Hero. Maybe- if you ask the right questions I know more than I think I do but I’m just, not putting the pieces and shit together on my own.”

“Admitting your own limits... that’s not something most can or will do,” Phil says after a long moment, head tilting with consideration.

“Yeah, well, here I am.” Tommy gestures grandly with one hand, tail swishing with the agitation running through him. “You guys- fucking *tortured me* and I’m *still* here, so- I’m *trying* and if you guys could give me a goddamn inch in this what would be- fucking *wonderful*.”

“Brave little Sparrow,” Phil says with a lilting of something that calls honey soft to a part of him long burrowed and he clenches his jaw in response. “Warden acted on his own when it came to you.”

“Don’t care,” Tommy says bluntly. “Take responsibility or something.”

“Careful,” Techno cautions with a warning rumble and Tommy curbs the urge to give him the finger. “Your *owner* is the reason Siren is missing.”

“And *I’m* the reason Siren is alive in the first place,” Tommy mutters before grimacing. “Look- we don’t have the perfect past but I’m- I’m taking responsibility for my own actions in things so- you can do the same.” He raises his chin stubbornly. “I don’t want Siren dead.”

“Not even if Dream gives you a reason for it?” the Angel challenges him with a stilling of his taloned fingers.

“Not even then,” Tommy says firmly. “I won’t- I *promised* him I wouldn’t let him go down that path.” He clenches his hands tight. “I’ll stop him myself if I have to,” he swears.

For Wilbur.

“You talk big game for someone who don’t have any powers of his own,” the Angel’s eyes gleams with dark amusement.

Tommy hesitates but-

“I- still have two capsules of Dream’s blood left.” He looks at the two Villains in front of him, sees the looks traded between them, a wordless communication he’s not part to, and he shoves at the wrap of vulnerability around his heart because – he’s the outsider here. “I’ve used his powers for *years*. With most- I can never anticipate how long they stay, or how I react to them, but I have nearly an hour of use for one capsule.”

“*Nearly* an hour,” Techno echoes with a raised brow.

“Fifty-eight minutes if you gonna be nitpicky about it,” Tommy grunts, unimpressed. “Had I known I’d be booted out of the tower I would have stocked up on the things but I *didn’t*.” He frowns. “Dream knew about them but let me keep them...” He stares at the ceiling, one hand scrubbing against the side of his mask. “Fuck, this is a mess.”

There’s just enough odd pieces about that he finds himself grasping at an incomplete picture and it’s an ever constant frustration.

“I’m being honest when I say I don’t know much.” Tommy takes a step forward with false nonchalance, snagging an apple from the bowl of fruit and flicking his fingers to give it a spin before catching it again, only just remembering to flick his tail to the side before dropping down on the armrest of the couch behind him. “Whatever Dream got himself wrapped up in he was very keen of me staying out of it, to the point he made an attempt to pay off Punz to get me out of it once he realized Schlatt was doing the same.”

“Does Schlatt know about your power?” the Angel wonders, black wings spread where he sits in the middle of the couch.

“Dunno,” Tommy admits. “He very well could have found out, he’s never been afraid to play dirty, and there’s many hours where Dream’s apartment was left unattended.” He frowns. “We were always careful, and even if he did, it’s not like *we* know everything about it. I’ve almost exclusively used Dream’s powers during the years since we were hiding it.”

“Why?” Techno wonders and Tommy tries not to think too hard about the way he’s drawn to the deep pleasant rumble of his voice.

Be honest, Tommy reminds himself, rolling the apple in his hands. *But be careful with what you say.*

“Dream never trusted the Hero Commission,” he says finally. “He knew that, if they found out about the true nature of my power, they wouldn’t waste any time figuring out the best

way to use it.” He stops the apple. “Pandora is filled with powers that, in the wrong hands, could be used in ways that would change the very structure of our society.”

“And your powers would allow you, in theory, to pick and choose between them.”

Tommy wrinkles his nose. “It’s a fucking buffet of powers and, well, yeah.” He leans forward, elbows on his knees, apple cradled in one palm and one pink palm. “We both decided early on that it would be safer to keep me out of the sight of the Hero Commission as much as possible. Dream was their golden goose, the apple of their eye, but even with him they only made so many allowances.” He blows a breath. “It helped that, with me copying his powers, they were alike enough that it was only logical to pair us together.”

How the hell Dream had spun the story, exactly, Tommy doesn’t know, but he’d seen Dream’s frustration grow, the resignation and heaviness in his gaze when he’d come down that day with the news that, by his fourteenth birthday, he’d have no choice but to become a Hero.

It was earlier than they had planned for, had *wanted*, but it had been too late to back out.

“The corruption of the government runs deep.” Techno stands behind the Angel, arms across his chest, leaning against the wooden wall.

“It does,” Tommy agrees with a grimace. “I told you- we were trying to *change things* but it’s been fucking *slow*.”

“*Too slow*,” Techno says with a heavy look that dares him to challenge it.

Tommy clenches his fingers and says nothing.

“What I don’t understand,” Techno says after a long moment, apparently satisfied with his silence, “is why Dream went after Siren that night.” Tommy’s tail stills, falling limp as he lifts his gaze to meet red eyes. “Even if it was to stop Schlatt from getting his hands on Siren to use his powers there’s still other ways he could have gone about it.” Techno’s mouth twists. “Why not go after Schlatt, for one? Not to mention that if he’d succeeded in killing Siren he would have ruined years of effort put into trying to change the very Hero foundation. There’s no way he would have been able to hide it. There were witnesses.”

Tommy thinks of the picture of himself, caught, curled over Siren’s form protectively that had made the front page of the newspaper in the morning.

RED CHAOS: HERO OR VILLAIN?

A betrayal instead of a murder.

“He’s lucky that you were there.” Tommy stiffens at the strange note in the Angel’s voice, something flooding through him with a quiver of his lip before he bites down on the inside of his cheek, lowering his head, hood falling low to shadow his eyes. “I don’t think I ever thanked you for protecting my son.”

“I didn’t do it for him,” Tommy forces out, shoulders curling tense.

I would have done it a thousand times over for Wilbur, he doesn't say.

"All the same," Phil's voice is a strange thing that strains something inside of him. "He lived because of you."

His heart feels as frail as a bubble with a needle pressing against the side of it, all too aware of the wet beats of it inside his chest, loud as he stares down at the green apple in his hands.

Because how many nights had he not laid awake, wondering if he'd done the right thing, and, in his lowest moments of weakness, wished he'd killed Siren himself that night if it meant he'd been able to stay at Dream's side.

The guilt is an ugly wretched thing inside of him.

"I couldn't let him do it." The confession spills from his lips with a tension that knots his shoulders tight. "*Don't kill*. That was the first rule Dream taught me."

"He's come a long way from the program."

The apple tumbles from his fingers, eyes widening as the blood drained out of his face, head snapping up.

"How did you—"

"Know about it?" Techno finishes, moving towards him with slow steps, a prowling kind of gait. "Do you think our dislike of the government is so simple? That it isn't *personal*?"

"There's three years between us but- it's just how things slotted together when we were growing up. I was the wiry odd kid and Techno – when Phil adopted him – took one look at me and decided that I needed someone to look after me."

Tommy's breath gets lost somewhere between one heartbeat and another.

"He's always been protective."

"You—"

The Villain lowers himself down, back towards him, and it feels *wrong* to see the Villain willingly down on one knee, and Tommy doesn't want to look but he can't *not* as long elegant fingers sweeps the long pale pink hair aside, baring the too familiar mark that he'd long resented seeing on his mentor's neck.

It's a damning thing, the brand charred into Techno's flesh, a faded thing but it's easy to make out the closed eye surrounded by two looping halos.

Dream's had always been red and inflamed, as if his body was constantly fighting off an infection, refusing to heal.

"I won't let them get to you as well," Dream's voice is a feverish thing in his memories, palms on his cheeks, eight-years-old and staring wide-eyed at the older boy. *"I won't let*

them, Tommy, never. I'll protect you."

"You got out," he breathes, a wrestle of emotions he can't make sense of twisting in his chest as he reaches out, hesitating before pressing his fingers down against the mark.

Techno's skin is warm beneath his touch, undeniable human, and the mark- it's cold to the touch unlike the Blood God's claim that wraps warm around his wrist and-

He stares at his hand, the exact same shade of pink as the Villain's skin, palm pressing flat to cover the brand from sight with the strange sort of sickening realization inside his chest.

"It's a God mark."

"Yes and no." His head snaps up to the Angel as the Villain leans down, hand settling over his to move it aside, talons careful not to prick his skin, and he's forced to once again look down at it, Techno remaining strangely still, chest expanding and lowering with calm even breaths. "It's an amalgamation of one. It was put there by humans, not a God."

Tommy swallows thickly.

"But why?" he wonders. "What would be the point?"

"Control, what else," Techno huffs in a low voice, face turned away, and Tommy's chest twist with a bubbling of misplaced guilt because-

He'd been part of that system, even if he and his mentor had fought against it, Dream as much a victim of it as Techno.

But he wonders how many had the brand on their necks.

Who hadn't gotten out like Techno.

Who hadn't survived like Dream.

"XD was one the Gods of this realm. One of the first." Phil's voice is impossible to read and Tommy is hyperaware of his warm calloused palm resting on top of his. "It is said that he fell in love with a human but that he was denied. In revenge, he bound the human to him and the human, in turn, chose death to escape his hold and it drove the God mad." Phil breathes out a soft noise, pale blond hair brushing against the edge of his mask. "XD is long gone but he was part of the creation of this world and his power still remains." Blue eyes, intense with the dark gleam in them. "And someone found a way to twist and use it."

In a distant sort of way Tommy is aware that the Syndicate is offering something back, an equal trade for his cooperation.

A vulnerability traded for his own, just like he'd asked for.

"So, what does it do exactly?" Tommy wonders. "We knew it had some kind of influence but *what* exactly- there were very little information to go on."

“It’s an echo of what it was supposed to be,” Phil says with a musing sort of voice. “To a weak mind in encourages compliance and loyalty, slowly erasing away anything else, rooting deep.” A beat. “It’s not a perfect thing, things seldom are when humans are meddling with things beyond their understanding.”

Tommy furrows his brows. “Dream’s always looked inflamed.”

“That means he’s still fighting it,” Techno grunts. “Mine was the same before I found a way to get rid of it completely.”

Tommy thinks of the still figure resting in a field of poppies blossoming in rot and his lips parts, but he swallows the question down and lets them close shut with a thin flattening line.

Phil’s hand lifts from his and Tommy’s tail, pressed tight against his leg, flicks in response to the twist of emotions in his chest as he reluctantly withdraws his touch from Techno’s neck.

The Villain, Wilbur’s brother, rises in an easy elegance despite his stature, turning to look down at him with red eyes that lingers for a moment before he steps away, Tommy’s gums itching strangely as the man turned on his heel and sprawled back in the seat Phil had vacated, ankle coming up to rest on his knee.

“I took it upon myself to study your bracelet.” Phil’s hand slips into a pocket on the side of his robe to pull it out and Tommy stares at it- the design so simple, innocent, washed away of the blood that was sure to have stained it. “Removing it also killed the enchantments on it.”

The inside of it is dull, lacking the purple glow that had been so very faint with the tight press against his skin, but Tommy can make out the runes crawling dark against the shine of the metal.

It’s easy enough to recognize Bad’s signature looping roundness staring back at him with mockery.

It’s a resentful thing to see something that had been clawing at him for months handled as a curiosity of interest.

“Curse of Binding-“ A taloned fingertip traces delicate over a line of runes. “Responsible for your inability to remove it. Unbreaking, here.” It’s turned, finger tracing down them, revealing more runes, none of which makes any sense to Tommy. “There’s some I don’t recognize but here-“ Phil’s finger presses down on a row that stands out, the care obvious in the shaping of them. “Runes aren’t made for healing but they can be used to enchant Protection.”

Tommy reaches out hesitantly and Phil relinquishes it easily, the metal cold where it had once been warm and he stares down at it.

His heart feels too heavy in his chest.

“Whoever made that for you wanted you safe.” In a strange way, it feels like a peace offering, something of comfort even as a bubbling sort of bitterness burns hot inside of him. “It’s

likely the reason you heel never got any worse than it did.”

“Yeah,” he says a bit emptily.

“Can I ask who made it?” Phil pursues as Tommy’s fingers fold around the metal, lowering it down to his lap. “The art of rune making has largely gone forgotten, I was surprised to see it.”

His lips draws back to bare teeth and tusks behind his mask. “The only thing you need to know,” he forces out with a rumble in his chest, “is that I’m punching him the next time I see him.”

Phil’s head tips back with the surprised laugh, a strange eerie familiarity with Wilbur, his black wings rustling on his back as he steps back, eyes shimmering with amusement and the corners of his eyes crinkling with his smile. “Fair enough, mate.”

Something itches in the back of his throat but he forces it down, putting the bracelet down demonstratively on the table instead of tucking it into his pocket like a part of him begs for.

“You understand that this will put a target on your head, don’t you?” Techno’s red eyes meets his. “Whatever power we end up finding for you won’t be anything like Dream’s. People will start asking questions.”

“Yeah, well, I’m gonna be working with you guys so I’m already making myself prime target.” Tommy grins with too much teeth. “What’s one more reason?”

Phil claps his hands his hands together, something very close to satisfaction in the cast of his eyes. “Then, welcome to the Syndicate, Red Chaos.”

-

They reach the same door at the end of the hallway that in some strange way has become *his*, and Tommy is forced to a halt as a hand comes down against the back of his neck, and his head twists up at Techno whose face is far too close with a breath of warm air that spills over his face.

His instincts prickles violently, muscles wiring tense, all too aware of the larger stature of the other with the spanning of the broad palm against his neck even through the fabric of his hood.

“Do not mistake amenability for anything but what it is,” the man warns him with a rumble. “If I find out that you’ve lied, that you’ve done *anything* that could jeopardize me getting my brother back, then there will be no place on earth where you’ll be safe.”

Tommy stares into vivid red eyes that glow in the low cast of light above them.

“If that happens,” Tommy says in a low voice, leaning closer, the hand tightening against his neck in a warning he strains against. “You won’t have to look for me,” he promises with a gleam of his own blue eyes.

-

There are no answers to be found in the stars, no matter how pretty they are, glittering in the dark sky.

When Tommy was a child he still found himself looking up at them, wondering about his place in the large universe with hands tucked beneath his armpits, huddled in the coat of a dead woman, snow thick on the ground beneath him and clinging to his hair.

But he's not that child anymore and there are no stars to be seen, underground in the Syndicate hide-out.

He sits on his bed, curled around a pillow, tail limp beside him as he closes his eyes and presses his forehead down against it.

Dream.

"And- I can promise that my mentor- he wouldn't hurt Wilbur."

Please.

"I wouldn't allow it."

Don't make me a liar.

-

A bit tiredly, he realises, that without Wilbur, Clementine is likely dead.

He wonders why, despite everything, the thought hurts.

Chapter End Notes

Oop, our boi is going through it. I say. As if he hasn't been going through it for the - checks- last 33 chapters before this one.

A lot of information this chapter, things are slowly starting to get pieced together, and we have the long awaited return of someone next chapter. Who? Well. You guys are just gonna have to wait and see :)

I nearly posted this chapter 3 times while editing so I'm resolutely ignoring the editing button for the rest of the evening and just yeeting this at you guys.

I hope that, wherever you are, you're having a lovely day/night<3

-

If you're interested there's a [Hush Now Discord](#) that tends to go *brrrrr* with the theories in designated channels and also have a lot of fun chatter and chill people on top of scoops of chaos with my lovely mods<3

You can find me on **tumblr** here: [corpse-art](#)
And I'm also on **twitter** now here: [corpsey_art](#)

I post a one hour countdown on all my social medias for a new chapter update if you're interested in such a thing :)

-

DUDES. We have new Hush Now art!! They're all amazing. Go and give them all so much love<3

(And if I ever miss linking your art- pls let me know!! I try to make sure I keep track of everything but I am but human)

[Red Chaos by taurustown](#) art

[Judge and Lethe by mothercoyote](#) art

[Hello, Theseus by magicaleraser94](#) art

[Lemon and Warden by magicaleraser94](#) art

[Lacking A Limb by PaxpiperStudios](#) art

[Techno and Tommy by PlantChecker](#) art

[Wolf Wilbur and Siren design by munch_neko](#) art

[Angel of Death and Red Chaos by holysatanballs](#) art

[Boy in the City by PoggersUser](#) art

[FANART MASTERPOST](#)

Chapter 35

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Humans don't fall gracefully.

Eyes wide, a hand slipping on the edge where they're struggling to hold on, wet with blood as Tommy throws himself forward, narrowly missing as they lose their grip with eyes wet with tears, something like surprise flashing in them before they disappear.

By the time he's forced himself forward, praying that, by any chance there might have been something they caught on, saved by some miracle, they've already collided against the pavement below, screams ringing out distant beneath him.

A bloody spot, dead in seconds, and Tommy had forced a breath where his shoulder pressed against the ruined wall beside him.

Compartmentalize. Get up. Keep moving.

Life is messy and Tommy knows it. He's seen the cruelty humans are capable of, in misery and desperation, cruelty and, then, his own hatred that *burns* as Dream's powers coils through his veins to wrap in glowing red swirls of energy around him.

Has felt skin split and bones break beneath his fist with adrenaline and emotions that tangles and gets pushed down.

We don't kill.

There's a child clinging with snotty sobbing breaths where she buries into his shoulder in the aftermath, tears staining the fabric wet as her father is taken away in handcuffs from a childhood bedroom painted red with cruelty.

She'd hid in the wardrobe her older sister had shoved her into, voice desperately quieted into the fur of a well-loved pink bunny that's now gripped in a small, white-knuckled grip, the other grasping onto him.

He'd been the first to arrive.

We don't kill.

He's just turned sixteen.

"The Syndicate doesn't harm children." He's curled up with his back to Dream, staring at the window, at the city that's bright outside it, neon lights on signs and a familiar graffiti smile over a coca cola advertising board. *"I went over every report and- they never go after children."*

He can hear the rustle of the covers as Dream twists around.

“Tommy- “

“They barely made the news,” Tommy interrupts him, curling tighter on himself. “I checked and it was just- a small mention on page 19 and meanwhile- Jester was all over the front pages because of that stupid fucking show in Las Nevadas.”

The world is a cruel place and Tommy doesn't love it, even as he swears his life to it.

He twists around, meeting his mentor's eyes in the dark.

“Are we doing enough, Dream?”

Green, as bright as the newly unfurled leaves in springs, light spilling over the scar on his mentor's face as his mouth twists.

“I don't know.”

-

Tommy thinks of the Warden.

He thinks of-

The feeling of the trident tearing through skin, flesh, muscles, the taste of blood in his mouth with a choked cough where he lies on the cold wet pavement, fourteen-years-old and staring up at the blank visor of the Villain looking down at him with a step and a rustle of golden armour.

He lifts his hoodie up, fingers ghosting over the healed scars just beneath his rib cage, evenly spaced with a matched set on his back.

His palm stops in the middle, warm in a way that's different from his left, an aching contrast against his cold clammy skin.

The name *Sam* seems like such an impossibly dull and normal name for the man who had caused them.

-

Tommy's back hits the floor hard, the air caught with a snap of his teeth as he twists, rolling to avoid the blunt weapon that slams down beside him.

He pushes down with spread fingers to lurch himself up with a twist on his heel and a bend of his back as the axe sails over his nose.

“Fucker-“ he grunts as his palms bends down over his head, vaulting backwards to land with several quick steps of his bare feet before he came to a halt with a bend of his knees, shoulders curling with a low growl his throat as he glowers at the Villain.

Techno settles the blunt training axe on his shoulder, head tilting with a twist of his lips that mocks a grin.

“You’re fast.” It’s acknowledgement from the man but it tastes *sour* and Tommy snaps his teeth, the rumble in his chest caught off with a dismissive flick of his tail and a turn of his head.

He flexes the fingers on his right hand, wrestling against the adrenaline and something *else*, a feral sort of urge that itches at his teeth and he gnashes them down with a frustrated huff.

“Yeah, well, I need more than speed,” he manages to grit out, his voice strangely hoarse as he peers at the Villain from the cast of shadow from his hood.

“You need to stop overthinking what you’re doing,” Techno tells him. “The instincts are *there*. All you need to do is trust them, learn how to *use* them, instead of letting them hold you back.”

“If this is the reason why you dragged me out of my fucking bed at this ungodly hour-“

Techno feints towards him, the move fast but *telegraphed* and Tommy jerks out of the path, growling low.

“Even if we find a power that works well with you-“ Techno swings out the axe, a dancer’s elegance and ease in the motion, forcing him low, something desperate flaring in response inside of him. “You’ll still be working with something unfamiliar when you have something you can already learn to use.”

And then it’s like a *switch*, sudden aggression in the way Techno moves towards him, the Villain’s tail flicking out behind him in a motion that makes his hackles rise and-

Tommy growls a ragged sound in warning and the Villain pauses, head lowering at an angle to catch his eyes.

His chest heaves, nose flaring and neck crawling, tail flicking sharp and tense with the gnawing urge for violence that crawls through his veins, eyes squeezing tightly shut from the lingering indecipherable look in those red eyes.

“Stop- fucking looking at me,” he heaves out, nails curling like claws at his side, jaw aching from the rigid tension.

“You’re handling it all wrong.” A rumble, something flaring inside of him in response as the Villain steps closer, a measured thing that makes him twitch, hyperaware of the rustle of the man’s heavy cloak. “You can’t keep pushing the instincts *down*.” Another step. “You have to work *with them* or they’ll get the better of you.”

“You don’t get to tell me what to do!” Tommy snarls, eyes opening, stepping back instead of lunging forward like everything inside of him strains to do, the floor contrastingly cold against the heat simmering inside of him with the heavy pounding of his heart. “Stop-“

“Do you feel challenged?” Techno’s voice is dark, *heavy*, something creeping into it that makes him stumble back with a desperately smothered *whine*. “My instincts don’t know what to make of you,” the Villain rumbles, tusks gleaming gold, far bigger than his own pitiful small ones that aches inside his mouth. “You dared to taste *my blood*.” Another step. “You’re in *my* territory now *Theseus* and I think it’s about time we figure out where, *exactly*, you fit into things.”

Tommy feels like he’s drowning, breathing heavy, heel still raised, step unfinished, frozen in place where he tethers on the breaking point with a tremble that wires tight through him.

“There’s red creeping into your eyes,” the Villain observes keenly with a pleased sort of echo. “You’re not human anymore, will never be again, tails and tusks and all, to pretend otherwise makes you a *fool*—”

A step.

A breath.

Tommy moves before he registers the urge, the feral vicious things that bleeds through him overwhelming and drowning rationality with a snarl as he collides with the older.

It’s messy.

He feels the blood beneath his nails, feels the palm that intercepts and prevents the unlatching of his mask, words distant and lost even as he’s slammed down against the ground with bruising force, mouth moving above him even as he scrabbles and claws and twists when he feels himself pinned down, violence and pounding desperation twining together into a mess he can’t begin to unravel.

He arches his back, the nails on his bare feet catching in fabric with an awkwardly hooked leg that gets battered aside, a deep heavy noise above him tasting of *warning-calm-warning* but he *can’t*—

A knee digs into his sternum, a heavy levering of weight that wheezes a gasp of struggle for air, the muscles in his abdomen rippling and—

He snarls back a rumbling sound that bleeds acidic with *fury-hate-fear*, heavy and thick and tearing at his vocal chords that bubbles wet down his throat.

A snort, palm leveraging against his head, forcing it down with a wrench that leaves him with the glaring sight of a wooden wall and—

Shock bursts through him as teeth tears ruthlessly through the skin on his bared neck, sinking deep enough to be halted by bone, large tusks gutting close to his throat.

Wheezy breath leaves his throat, frozen where he lies, still as a rabbit with rapid blinking of his eyes, blood running wet and warm to stain his hoodie and pool on the floor.

A strange sort of rationality follows, clarity with a harsh stuttered breath.

Slowly the teeth unlatches, dragging out of his skin with a wet sound that makes him twitch.

“Well, that worked,” Techno’s voice is a dark rumble of amusement, hand raised to wipe the blood dripping down his chin with nonchalance as Tommy numbly rolls his head to meet the glow of the man’s red eyes, bright inside the frames of the pink mask. “No hard feelings.”

“What the *fuck*—” Tommy slaps a palm against his neck, squeezing down against the blood flow. “You *bit me*—”

“You’re not the only one with teeth,” Techno says with a shrug. “And it worked, didn’t it?”

Tommy stares at him.

“You—” A desperate sort of laugh bubbles out of him, head falling back with a *thunk*. “Fucking fine, you made your *point*.”

“And what’s that?”

“Don’t be an asshole,” Tommy grunts, wincing as he slowly rolled himself aside and pushed into a sitting position, blood dripping between his fingers. “I need to work with my instincts, blah blah, I’ve *got it*.”

“You don’t,” Techno hums and Tommy throws him a look of disbelief, removing his hand with a *what is this then* gesture. “Mod hybrid instincts are different from other hybrids,” the man snorts. “You will understand but right now you don’t.” A beat. “You should put pressure back on that before you pass out.”

Tommy huffs but yanks on his hoodie to bunch the fabric and push down on it.

“If you’re gonna be of any use in a week you need to get a handle of your instincts,” Techno tells him with a look that prickles at his neck. “Right now you’re telegraphing your every thought with your tail and shoving things down instead of working with them. It’s making you into a ticking timebomb.”

“If I knew I was signing up to get my own personal therapist I would have said no,” Tommy grumps.

The Villain makes a low rumble, strangely comforting to a twitch of Tommy’s ears as the man straightens out with an easy limber elegance, moving to the side of the training room as Tommy’s eyes trails his path across the wooden floor, lingering on those broad shoulders with an itch in his jaw.

He focuses his gaze on his bare feet, reaching forward to poke at one of the middle toes that had twisted, clearly broken, he realizes with a flex of his toes.

Below it, the end of his heel is pink with healed skin, like someone had slapped a patch on it.

He lets out a tired huff through his mask where he sits, neck torn open, blood staining his already ruined hoodie further.

“You’re gonna owe me some new clothes after this,” Tommy tells the other as he draws his legs into a fold, tucking his feet out of sight.

“I’ll make sure to pick up some fabric and fingerprint on my next grocery run,” Techno says dryly.

Tommy’s response is swallowed, stilling as a water bottle is rolled across the ground, halting with a cold press against his thigh.

And-

He remembers all too well the many times Dream had done the exact same thing, water beading on the side of it at the end of training.

He reaches for it, wedging down the bottom of it in the fold of his knee, and-

The lid has already been unlatched, making it easy to open onehanded, and he can’t place the feeling that twists inside of him as he drops it aside and unlatches his mask, pausing for a breath, a moment, before tipping it down with a closing of his eyes, relishing at the cold relief.

He swallows down half before he presses his mask shut and lets out satisfied groan that echoes metallic, resisting the urge to sway back and sprawl down as the slow fading of adrenaline makes him all too aware of the aches and blossoming bruises on his body.

But beneath it all, there’s a strange sort of satisfaction, a feeling that clings stubbornly alongside relief, tail twitching with a small thump against the ground.

“So, what makes piglin instincts so different from, say, avian ones?” Tommy asks, eyeing the med kit Techno approaches him with, wariness creeping inside of him.

“It’s different in the same way we make a distinction between mob hybrids, hybrids and humans.” The Villain lowers himself down in front of him. “How much do you know about hybrid nature?”

“S different from hybrid to hybrid,” Tommy says after a moment of consideration. “You can be avian but different birds with influence behaviour so- it’s not so simple as to just, shove it all into one box.”

“A good starting point,” the Villain grunts and the approval wraps around his heart with a squeeze as the med kit is opened up. “Remove your shirt.”

Tommy’s fingers curls into the hem, the other hand pressing down harder against his neck.

“Mob hybrids?” he prompts with a crack in his voice he fails to catch.

Techno pauses, red eyes scrutinizing him.

“Shirt,” the Villain says slowly. “I’ll tell you about it as I fix your shoulder before you pass out on me.”

Tommy would sooner rather *not*, thank you very much.

But he recognizes the stupidity in putting it off and his fingers curls white knuckled into the fabric, reluctantly dragging it up over his head, pushing down on his beanie to make sure his hair was all covered before letting it drop to the ground with a curving press of his shoulder as he hunches on himself.

At least the feather necklace is stuffed safely under his mattress. The moment Techno had uttered the word *training* he wasn't taking any chances, half-awake as he stumbled to change.

Techno pauses for a beat, something Tommy doesn't understand visible briefly in the other's eyes as he glowers back, daring the man to comment.

His body is a mess and he knows it. Ugly in the marks left on him, from the three marks of the Warden's trident, Schlatt's curling whip spiraling down his arm in a long pink gleaming burn scar, Sapnap's palm print low on the side of his hip, standing out starkly even amidst the mess of other scars crowding on his skin.

He's always been gangly, stretched out, still settling into the shot of height that had hit him in his early teenage years, and the two weeks with Warden, with Ponk's powers siphoning what little reserves the mashed potato he got forcefully fed managed to give him had left him the skin clinging tight against the muscles he'd fought to put on.

The pink arm is just another scar, his own natural pale skin twisting into it from where the blade of the axe had torn through, nails dark.

It's a history of violence, skin deep and impossible to ignore.

It feels like a weakness.

"Turn around," the Villain says, finally, and Tommy clenches his jaw but plants his palms down to spin around with arms, folding over his chest as he hunches on himself in front of Wilbur's brother.

Trust. That he doesn't have or want to give as he bares the grotesque expanse of scars where wings had torn through, webbed white and thick in a mocking echo of what had been so close to be his.

Tommy prefers not to think about his back.

He prefers not to think about a lot of things.

"Mob hybrids are different in the sense that- piglins had community and language, they weren't just beasts, as much as people would like to make them out to have been." There's a rustle of things behind him. "They had communities, trading stations with humans who entered the Nether, language and there's records of songs, preserved despite time. It doesn't make us less or more than other hybrids but it makes us *different*."

He hisses as a cloth dosed in sterilizing presses against his neck, muttering curses under his breath as Techno wipes the blood away, pressing down firmly but not cruelly.

“Instincts are a part of us, something we grow with.” There’s patience in the Villain’s voice, a settling rhythmic cadence that reminds him of Dream where he sits, goosebumps running up his skin with a prickling of his neck. “You’re currently going through a crash course in them and ignoring them won’t work because they’re part of who we *are*. Good and bad, you can’t just pretend they aren’t there or you will find yourself in a situation you can’t handle.”

“Speaking from experience?” Tommy asks with grudging sort of curiosity.

“You could say that,” Techno grunts, pressing down over the largest gorge. “There are no other piglin hybrids, at least that I know of. I grew up mostly with humans but set apart because there are certain instincts that humans, or other hybrids, won’t understand because it’s something only mob hybrids experience.”

“Like the gold.”

“Like the gold,” Techno agrees, cloth removed and a small bag of blood clotting powder opened and dusted over the toothmarks and the deeper gorges of tusks, a gloved hand smearing it out a moment later. “We *need* gold in the same way avians need their nests, or creeper hybrids needs to consume certain minerals-“

“They eat *rocks*?” Tommy interrupts, trying, and failing, to picture Sam biting down on a large rock, the mental image blurred with the memory of golden armour and-

“They *can* but most just grind it down to dust beforehand.” Techno’s voice is wry and Tommy clings to the distraction. “But their teeth are designed to be able to do it if needed.”

“Oh.” Tommy frowns, unsure what to feel about it. “I see.”

Techno clears his throat. “Some hybrids,” he says, voice measured and impossible to read, “don’t function well in the same territory unless there’s an established hierarchy.”

There’s a stretch of silence.

“Piglins are well documented to have had a strict hierarchy-“

“You’re joking,” Tommy interrupts flatly, the tuft of his tail disappearing beneath his knee with a *fwip*.

“You’re getting a crash course in hybrid instincts,” Techno says gruffly. “I know less than I’d want to, a lot of what is known of piglin instincts are twisted in books so there’s little *actual* information known about them and not exactly a lot of us left around now. So we’re both gonna have to figure things out here.”

“Fun,” Tommy grumbles, twitching as a warm grasped his shoulder, forcing him out of his hunched position to get a better look at the clotting wounds. “I’m not- part of whatever your thing is so we should be fine, right?” A dragging silence. “It’s just a week.”

“Sure,” Techno says slowly. “Right as rain.”

“You’re not exactly inspiring confidence, Blade.”

“You’re not exactly a reliable thing to anticipate-“

“Who are you calling *thing*-“

“-considering you’re not only working with piglin instincts,” Techno continues, ignoring him. “You responded to Angel’s bird call after you bit me.”

Tommy’s mouth clicks shut.

“*What?*” he manages weakly. “I didn’t-“

“You did.” The Villain’s tone leaves little room for protest and Tommy struggles for some reason that the other might have to lie but-

He draws up empty, ribs expanding and then lowering with a harsh breath.

“Piglins are pack hybrids, the word we use for family *sounder*.” There’s tension in the Villain’s voice, something deep and gritted, a thumb dragging over the gaping wound from a tusk. “They say that what piglins value the most is gold.” A breath. “That’s wrong.”

“Oh.” Tommy drags a thumb over the golden ring on his finger, guilt bubbling in his chest. “I’m sorry,” he says.

A huff, warm where spills over his neck where he sits, bare chested with a beanie crammed down to hide the messy blond curls of his hair.

“We’ll get him back.” Techno releases him. “And if we don’t,” a heavy rumble of deep promise, “the city of L’Manberg with pay the price.”

And-

Perhaps- he should protest it, say something against it, to ask for some sort of mercy.

It’s what a good Hero would do.

But he thinks of Wilbur’s warm touch, his gentle promise of safety, of being *there* with the painted walls of his bedroom and the discs that had played him his first bedtime story.

He thinks of the rise of their voices melding to echo over the cold stretch of Pogtopia, laughter and warmth and a sense of belonging.

“*This might sound whiny and dumb.*” Tommy remembers the warmth of Wilbur’s arms around him, the curve of his smile against his neck. “*But for years, all I’ve wanted was someone to just talk to. To be myself with. To have someone like you.*”

And-

He can’t find the words for it.

-

There's something impossibly awkward about the situation Tommy finds himself in.

He's used to being in odd situations but fucking *existing* in the Syndicate hide-out, as if he *belongs there* while knowing fully well he doesn't, well.

It's fucking with his brain.

Idly, he thinks he might be doing better if he wasn't painfully aware of the civilian personalities behind the people around him but he *is*, and he finds himself staring just a tad too long on Techno or Phil during the morning coffee he drinks with a grimace.

It's a bizarre switch from being hauled around in chains, potions leaving his mind and limbs sluggish, but whatever the *fuck* Techno's power was had cleared that out of his system so now he-sits.

Bruised, the wound at his neck stitched shut from the training session Techno had dragged him out to in the ungodly hours of the morning.

Techno is having an easy time with breakfast, considering his mask ended at his nose, leaving his mouth and tusks bare.

Phil is absently eating some yoghurt piled with barriers and seeds to his right and this close Tommy can see the vague protrusion of metal that forms a small very faint mimic of a beak that stretches down, allowing the detachment of a lower panel behind it to bare just enough of the Villain's mouth to allow him to eat with an angling of the spoon.

It's not an unusual design, most of the masks Tommy had seen during his years of Hero work had some sort of detachment or opening, and there's green outlines to accent the beak.

He bites down on his own spoon of yoghurt piled with fresh berries and crunchy cereal that tastes vaguely like cardboard, which he wrinkles his nose at before the taste of blueberries and banana overshadows it.

He drags the spoon against his teeth before lowering it down against the table, swallowing after chewing it through.

Tommy clears his throat.

"So--"

"No work-talk during food," Phil interrupts him without looking up from the phone he's scrolling on.

Tommy twitches, glancing at Techno who meets his eyes just as he takes a liberal bite out of a steaming hot potato.

I think I'm having a crisis, Tommy thinks a bit absently as he looks down at the breakfast splayed in front of him.

There's different breads and spreads, a pile of pancakes and then yoghurt, cereal, juice and coffee, a bowl of scrambled eggs, boiled potatoes and sausages which had made his stomach turn from the scent of the heaviness of it.

He's gotten through half of his bowl of cereal and he reaches out, grasps the handle of his cup, pausing and slowly turning it around, staring at it.

It's a simple thing with delicate traces of a blue pattern and then arching branches with green leaves and lemons bright yellow against the white and-

He recognizes it as one of the cups Sam had drunk his coffee from while working in the small kitchen, humming to himself as he kneaded and worked the dough for the fresh bread of the sandwiches they sold, patterns of flour in hand prints on his black apron and at the very tip of his nose.

There'd been a radio playing music with static undertones when Tommy peered inside, the scent of fresh bread and-

He coils his muscles tense and slowly places it down, slowly sliding it away from himself and placing his fingers in his lap, folding them together, out of sight to hide the trembles.

I'm fine, Tommy thinks a tad desperately, thumb rubbing against the golden ring as he stares down at the table without really seeing it, a muted kind of buzz in the back of his mind as he blinks slowly with a crawling of ants beneath his skin, itching at his neck. *I'm fine*.

"Did you know that geckos lick their eyes to moisturize?" Tommy pushes the ruby of the ring, forcing it around his finger. "No eyelids."

He can feel their eyes on him.

"Is that so?" Phil says after a stretch of silence.

"Mmhmm," Tommy bobs his head. "And male whales, when they're in *the mood*, will lay with their belly up on the surface and," he gestures vaguely, "let It Breathe and sailors saw it and that's where, like, at least some stories of tentacled sea monsters came from."

Dead silence.

"Because they looked like--"

"We got it," Phil interrupts and when Tommy glances up at him it's in time to see him drop his spoon of yoghurt back into his bowl. "How about we make an exception this morning, mate." There's a strained sort of note to his voice, like a held back laugh in the cough he makes. "You had a question?"

"Oh!" Tommy perks up. "So I was wondering- before Warden found me I had one of those, uh, small Slimecicles with me?" He lifts a hand to measure against the top of the table. "He said- that they were connected an Jester might be missing but maybe there's something we can get from them? Or uh, the big Slimecicle?" he offers hesitantly.

He glances up to meet the Angel of Death's blue eyes.

"He might know something about- what happened when Siren, Jester and Nemesis were taken." A beat. "I was kinda knocked out for most of it."

"We've already thought of that," Techno says gruffly, wiping his fingers on a napkin. "But Slimecicle won't listen to anyone but Jester. He's sworn to silence." A snort. "Jester isn't a fool; he wouldn't trust just anyone with his secrets. Slime won't talk."

Tommy furrows his brow, considering the grudging sort of respect in Techno's voice in regards to Jester, Quackity-? Quackity made sense. Warden had been fixating on getting any information on- on Jester in particular and-

Tommy swallows.

"Oh." His teeth sinks into the inside of his cheek "Did War-den mention anything about a Slimecicle with me?"

"No."

Tommy grimaces. "Right. Love that." He slumps back in his chair, fingers finding the ring to circle around his finger as he mulls things over. "Chronos said to look into the Hero Commission."

"Any idea for what?" Phil asks with a tilt of his head.

"No clue," Tommy admits frankly. "He wasn't making much *sense*, and then he was bleeding out of his eyeballs and stuff." He gestures vaguely. "But he was very insistent on it."

The Syndicate kitchen isn't terribly odd, fancier than his own, that's for sure, and less homely than their *actual* home had been but, it's clearly lived in and it's an odd sort of thing to confront, staring down at the stains from bleach rubbed into the wood of the table.

It's a strangely domestic situation to sit and eat breakfast with people who had been trying to kill him on more than one occasion, barely scraping by with his life still intact, adrenaline pushing his heart into wet frantic pumps.

Life.

Somehow.

"Helpful," Techno says wryly. "Anything more you want to share?"

Tommy considers him. "Did you know it's physically impossible for pigs to look straight up to the sky?" He flicks his tail. "It's because of the anatomy of their neck muscles and spine that limits the movement of their head and restricts them from looking like, totally upwards." His mouth curves sharp behind his mask. "Pigs never get to see the moon."

"Sometimes, life is about how you chose to look at it," Phil muses with a tilt of his head. "Even a pig can see the reflection of the moon in a puddle of water."

Tommy meets those eerie blue eyes, scoffing before he turned away.

-

“The fuck-?” Tommy stares at Phil who watches him with an easy tilt of his head. “You’re just- gonna let me walk around here!?”

“I’m not holding your hand,” Techno snorts. “We don’t have time to babysit you.”

Tommy rounds at him, pointing a finger. “That is *not* the point of it and you *know* it.”

“We have a week, little sparrow.” Phil’s voice sends a shiver down his spine as he reluctantly let his arm fall with one last dirty glower before meeting eerie blue with a firm press of his lips behind his mask. “We need to prepare.”

“I get that,” Tommy gets out, frustrated and feeling strangely wrong footed. “But I’m-“

I’m still your enemy, he wants to say. *You shouldn’t trust me to walk around freely.*

But he can’t force the words to form, remembering all too well the terror of the Warden’s cell, the humiliation of his weakness with his arms bound and carried around.

It’s what he wants. Offered so *easily*. But it feels like a lie. Feels like a *trap*.

And he risks stumbling upon the Warden all on his own.

“You need codes to get out, and anything important we don’t want you inside is similarly locked, we’re not allowing you to roam carelessly,” Techno grunts out. “But if we’re going to be working together there needs to be some sort of trust.”

Phil leans forward and Tommy stares at the man a bit helplessly.

At Wilbur’s father.

“You said you’d help.”

“And I am!” Tommy snaps back. “I’m just-“ He flexes his fingers, frustration bubbling inside of him. “I’m not- I’m not gonna fucking *do* anything to jeopardize this but-“ He clenches his jaw because he doesn’t *know*, can’t rationalize up why they shouldn’t when he doesn’t want to.

But – for all that these people are supposed to be his enemies, it’s Wilbur’s family behind the masks in front of him and there’d been relief in that.

Phil takes a step towards him, and then another, quiet where his boots presses down before he halts in front of him, shorter, and yet his presence makes Tommy feels small, *young*, something ancient in those eyes that regard him quietly.

And when those hands reaches out he twitches but doesn’t step back when palms flattens against the sides of his face with a framing of his jaw, pulling him down with a hunching of

his shoulders.

He shouldn't allow it but his heart aches, lost without something to tether him.

Without Dream and Wilbur.

The mask on his face prevents him from feeling the warmth, save for the press of Phil's fingertips just at the edge.

And then Phil makes a sound, something that's distinctly non-human, and he flinches in surprise, a breath drawn sharply because it *soothes*, in a way that draws at something long-forgotten inside of him, ignored and shoved down.

"Everyone here has been given strict rules." Tommy's world locks on the *blueblueblue* of the Angel's eyes. "No harm will befall you, provided, no harm befalls our own."

A breath, sharply drawn and then let out, and he takes a hard step back, taloned fingers slipping easily from his face with a tilt of the man's face.

"Don't get the wrong idea," Tommy grumps, stuffing his hands into the plain blue hoodie Techno had thrown at him. "We're not *friends*."

"We're business partners working for our own mutual benefit," Techno agrees with a curling of his lips to bare tusks.

-

Quackity's knees hits the ground, teeth gritting together as he breathes heavily, blood and sweat slick on his back, sticking to his wings in a way that's decidedly *gross*.

He forces them tighter against his back, glaring through the dull locks of his hair at Schlatt as the man kneels down in front of him, fear flattening the miserable excuse of wings left tight against his spine.

"Don't-" Quackity wheezes out as a palm settles deceptively gently against his cheek. "I'm not telling you *shit*, you know it-" A thumb at the corner of his lips silences him with a swallowed noise, pulling at the scar that stretches ugly over his face.

"Oh little bird, I've missed you," Schlatt croons, *softsoftsoft* in a way that makes him want to tip his head into once kind hands.

There's a part of him that still aches, rotten and bitter and twisted but still *there*, for the man in front of him.

A tear spills wet down his cheek from his blind eye, caught deftly with a brush.

Schlatt leans closer, hand sliding up, fingers slipping through his hair before abruptly clenching tight, wrenching his neck back with a choked noise of pain, more bird than he wants it to be, and he sees the disgust that dips into those dark eyes.

“I thought I trained you out of that,” Schlatt’s grip tightens further, pulling at the roots of his hair, Quackity’s chest heaving with strained short breaths as he’s dragged up in a horrible bend, the older easily towering over him and Quackity fucking *hates* how small he feels. “But don’t worry, we have all the time in the world to correct it, don’t we, love.”

“Don’t- call me that-“ Quackity spits out, fury tight in his chest. “You don’t have the *right*-“

“Is that what *they* call you now?” Schlatt wonders, smoke twisting out from the corner of his lips, lava roping red up his dark horns. “Do they call you *sweetheart* as well? Fill you head with lies about your importance?”

A numb sort of horror bleeds through him.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about-“ A hot palm wraps around his throat, sizzling hot against his skin and he wrenches back with a cry, unable to escape the hold on his hair but straining desperately.

“I thought I told you not to lie to me,” Schlatt hisses, jerking his hand back, too close when Quackity pries his eye open, trembling as he shrinks.

It’s a primal sort of thing, years of conditioning under Schlatt’s hand before he’d made his escape to freedom.

“I’m not-“ He wrenches aside, scrabbling away from the hand that flares bright with Schlatt’s power. “I hate you!” Quackity snarls, a desperate pleading noise that rips from his chest with a wretched kind of weight and scraps of bravery that he clings to. “You don’t owe me anymore! I can do whatever the fuck and if your giant fucking ego can’t take it then-“

His cheek explodes with pain, head whipped aside with a cough, tasting blood with a laugh.

“You’ve always been in over your head, Schlatt,” Quackity pants out. “I don’t know what the hell you’re planning but there’s no way you’ll be able to win this time.”

“That’s what you think.” The lava sizzles and dies, dark smoke blown in a cloud he struggles not to breathe in, eyes watering. “I’ve got a bigger piece on the chessboard than *you* this time.”

Schlatt rises, towering above him, and Quackity had once thought him handsome in a foolish kind of naivety.

He wants nothing to do with the part of him that still does.

Instead he gathers up a glob of bloody spit, aiming for the stupid sheen of Schlatt’s shoes.

Schlatt’s steps halts and Quackity’s satisfaction is short lived as he feels his wing being grasped, protests lost in the cry that wrenches out of him at the *snap*, at the twist of his feathers under a rough palm that sizzles and smokes.

The pain is a crawling vicious thing that bleeds white hot through his veins before he’s abruptly released, collapsing back and scrambling as far as the chain around his throat will

allow him with a hard jerk of his neck as he's brought to a forceful halt.

"You've gotten mouthy," Schlatt tells him, eyes dark where they rest on him. "Take this as a warning."

"Dream won't follow you forever," Quackity snaps back, the scent of burnt feathers making his stomach twist. "Whatever hold you have on him--"

"Oh, his use will run its course." Schlatt waves a dismissive hand, stepping closer, and Quackity grimaces when his own spit is wiped away on him, dark eyes daring him to protest with a curling stretch of his lips when he does nothing. "He's not the one I'm playing for."

Quackity's heart pounds in his chest because there's only one person Schlatt has been following doggedly, all the way to the doors of Las Nevadas itself.

"You left him--"

"See, Siren was the harder one to catch out of the two of them." Schlatt's grin is an ugly thing. "He's always been a slippery bastard with those powers of his. But now that I have him- well, Red Chaos is the easy one." Something envious, something darkly satisfied. "Dream's loyal little mutt will come running sooner rather than later."

"Schlatt--"

"I heard he's teaming up with the Syndicate now," the man interrupts him without mercy. "He's *desperate* and that will be the end of him. L'Manberg won't care what happens to him. He'll be just another Villain, left to rot in Pandora as far as the cattle out there is concerned." A grin. "But he'll be *mine*. Everything Tubbo was meant to be before you took him from me only *better*."

Quackity shivers, swallowing thickly.

"Nothing to say in response?" Schlatt laughs. "Maybe you *are* learning." The Number Two Hero turns dismissively and Quackity glares at his back, arms tight around his chest and wings flat. "I'll be back, don't you worry. I wouldn't want you to get lonely in here, after all."

The door closes shut and it takes a long time before Quackity slowly allows his muscles to relax, hissing, one hand creeping up his shoulder, clawing down above the aching ruin of his wing.

"Fucking hell kid, I hope you have more than a half-assed plan." He slumps down, shivering despite the heat of the walls around him, glaring at the obsidian, the skin on his throat burning as he swallows.

"Jester?" Nemesis voice reaches him with worry and he closes his eyes.

"I'm fine," he grits out.

"No you're not."

“No I’m not,” he agrees with a short barked laugh. “I don’t think anyone is *fine* right now.”

There’s a moment of silence, his eyes slipping close, exhaustion bearing down heavy.

“Siren still hasn’t returned.”

Beside them the cell remains as glaringly empty as it has for days now.

“No,” Quackity agrees tiredly. “He has not.”

-

Despite Phil’s promise he can’t help but feel like he’s just waiting for the wrong foot to drop.

It’s stupid.

It’s not *really* stupid, he knows that but-

“I’m overthinking this,” Tommy grits out to himself. “They *need* you, it would be stupid to do anything now-”

“He made a pinky promise!”

He halts, frowning as he swerves around, peering back towards one of the doors he’d just passed by.

He takes a step back, and then another, pausing and then straightens his shoulders before he pushes it open.

Tommy’s eyes widens at the sight of Chronos, harried and disarrayed where he leans heavily against the side of a deeply uncomfortable looking Faux Pas, something cradled against his chest with stubbornness.

“I told him he’s not supposed to use his powers,” Faux Pas hoists Chronos up with a grunt as the other Vigilante threatens to slip forward, so pale his eyes stand out starkly, red rimmed and frantic. “I left him for *five minutes*-“

“He- he promised-“ There’s exhaustion, a stuttering of something lost, shoulders hunching protectively even in Faux Pas’s hold on him. “He said- he said- and he-“

“And there’s also that,” Faux Pas mutters, fox mask swiveling briefly towards Tommy with a look he can’t read before focusing down on Chronos who is muttering to himself. “He insisted on coming here and, being the kind person that I am, I decided it was better to take him than let him crawl out the window and get lost somewhere so-“ A hand gestures out in a *here you go* sort of way.

Tommy hesitates, glancing at the Warden, the only other person in the room, his shoulders drawing tight before he takes a careful step out with a clip of his hip against the doorway.

“Chronos?”

There's stark relief in the brown eyes that snaps to him, a bright sort of toothy grin spreading with a loopy drooping of his head.

"Red," the Vigilante breathes, dropping his cheek against Faux Pas' arm. "Just the Hero I wanted to see." A laugh, heavy and tired with a wheeze. "Well, not me, exactly but--"

His hand opens and Tommy's hope blossoms and dies because it's not *his* Slimecicle but *a* Slimecicle, brown eyes peering curiously at him from behind square glasses with a small tilt of its head.

"Hi," it greets him.

Chapter End Notes

Hi guys :) been a lil bit since I last updated but I'm baaack!

Before I go onto things I just have to spare a moment and brag about meeting the really, really cool author of Orange Light (Painted by Morning Sun). That's right, *the* HoneyDew_Tea (also known as my dearly beloved Dewdrop). I'm still riding the high of that, amazing really, sometimes the world feels very small.

Special thanks to Silver and Mary-chan for the Animal Info. Was very informative<3

Things happens this chapter. Cool. Look at that.

Hush also had a one year anniversary, almost forgot about that, look at us go.

... I'm all out of words and just had to scramble the last minute editing. Ah. If you see any spelling mistakes, no you didn't, my brain is on snooze mode, and as always I will just blame it on English being my second language. Easy out.

Hope you guys are having a wonderful day/night wherever you are<3

-

If you're interested there's a [Hush Now Discord](#) that tends to go *brrrrr* with the theories in designated channels and also have a lot of fun chatter and chill people on top of scoops of chaos with my lovely mods<3

You can find me on **tumblr** here: [corpse-art](#)
And I'm also on **twitter** now here: [corpsey_art](#)

I post a one hour countdown on all my social medias for a new chapter update if you're interested in such a thing :)

-

DUDES. We have new Hush Now art!! They're all amazing. Go and give them all so much love<3

(And if I ever miss linking your art- pls let me know!! I try to make sure I keep track of everything but I am but human)

[You're Not Mine, Blood Child by radiovys](#) art

[Blood God by the-block-articles](#) art

[Little Slimecicle by cicadabeats](#) art

[Hush Now by tododokii](#) animatic (unfinished)

[The Boy \(tail swish!!\) by PlantChecker](#) art

[Going Through Changes by dayseagedoodles](#) art

[Versions of Tommy by strawbbe](#) art

[The Crew by PlantChecker](#) art

[Siren by PlantChecker](#) art

[Big Chomp by DomdomDraka](#) art

[Blood For the Blood God by SquirrelViolent](#) art

[Hush One Year Anniversary by PlantChecker](#) art

[Tommy and Fran \(so much floof!!\) by PlantChecker](#) art

["It's been fun" by _Solo_uwu](#) art

[FANART MASTERPOST](#)

Chapter 36

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Hi,” Tommy squeezes out back, a bleak sort of empty thing where he stands under the attention of people he hardly knows.

Faux Pas, Chronos, Warden and a Slimecicle that isn’t *his* Slimecicle.

Warden’s hand is wrapped around the handle of his trident, gold shimmering distractedly at the corner of his eyes with a nauseous twist of his stomach that he struggles to ignore.

“I’ve been looking for you!” the Slimecicle peers up at him. “You are Red Chaos, right?”

“I am,” Tommy mutters, unsure what to feel, staring at the being that looks so much like *his* Slimecicle and yet- off, wrong, *not what he wants to see*.

Chronos sinks down finally with a push from Faux Pas, sagging with clear exhaustion in the armchair, the Slimecicle landing in a cradle in his lap, fingers trembling and pale, right eye half-white, dazed and out of it.

“I’ll get some water-“

“Cola,” Tommy interrupts and Faux Pas halts, the fox mask settling on him with a sharp look. “He needs- the sugar will be good for him.” Tommy tips his head meaningfully to Karl. “His powers are burning through him faster than he can keep up, yeah? So give him something to burn – cola and, if he can stomach it, get something that’s low effort to swallow down.”

Tommy licks his lips, steeling himself, and then he looks up, staring straight at the dark visor of the Warden.

“There’s should be some mashed potato in the fridge,” he says, mouth curling sharp behind his mask. “Isn’t that right, *Warden?*”

Warden.

Sam.

Sam who gave him a job and paid him with an envelope of money without questions, who let him sneak Fran cookies beneath the table and who had given him a bag of homemade food for Christmas along with a green beanie pressed down on his head with a fond look.

His Sam.

“There should be,” Warden answers, voice impossible to read, shifting with a quiet rustle of metal, a part of his brain purring distractedly at the *goldgoldgold* before he ruthlessly pushes it down.

“You should go get some,” Tommy says, something ugly and cold curling through him.
“*Make yourself useful.*”

It’s vitriol and fear, it’s something twisted and wrong, a want to inflict pain that pounds wet with the beating of his heart.

“*That’s not very Hero like behaviour,*” Siren’s voice ghosts at the back of his mind, a memory of mockery with his hands wet with blood.

There’s a stilling of limbs, a careful straightening of shoulders, chin raising tall, a step taken towards him with fingers that folds tight around the gleaming handle of the trident.

Tommy refuses to move, refuses to hardly *breathe*, and Warden steps past him, just shy of brushing against his shoulder where he stands tightly pressed against the doorway, where the Villain pauses.

“We’re working together now.” Warden’s voice, if Tommy listens for it- he imagines he can hear the familiar cadence of Sam’s warm voice layered into the metallic hollowness of the voice changer. “What’s in the past, is in the past.”

They both know it’s not as simple as that.

It never is.

“Coworkers?” Tommy cracks out with an irony that tastes acidic on his tongue.

Warden’s head tips just an inch.

“Coworkers.”

Tommy’s body aches in the memory of broken bones, of fear and pleading that leaves his lips uselessly under the ruthless hands of the Villain that shows him no mercy.

“Then you can get it yourself,” the Villain says with dangerous dip of his voice that makes him flinch with a twitch of his fingers.

The humiliation of it *burns* and anger feasters dark and vicious inside his chest as Warden retreats down the hallway behind him.

-

“I could sense some tension there,” Faux Pas comments in a nervous laugh, Chronos asleep against his shoulder after managing to drain down half a cola with a bubbly little hiccupped burp.

Tommy drags his goggles down over his eyes, hiding his expression as much as possible from the Vigilante as he watches the small Slimecicle on the table.

“I didn’t know you worked with the Syndicate.”

Faux Pas's right hand tap against his knees, a rhythmic thing of counting, thumb, index, middle, ring, pinkie, round and round, a repeat pattern that he hardly seems to be aware of.

"I don't, technically. I work- well, for myself, if you want but." Faux Pas absently adjusts Chronos from slipping down. "There's only so much I can do on my own and Villains are often far more keen to work with me than any of the Heroes."

"I can imagine," Tommy snorts, easing back just an inch, curiosity gnawing on him as he regards the other.

It's not often he's had the chance to talk with Vigilantes.

There had been a few, here and there, but- Dream's status as the Number One Hero hadn't exactly made him the most approachable and Red Chaos, a bit ironically, made him even less so because people didn't know what to expect from him.

Dream's man through and through.

Tommy's most memorable meeting with a Vigilante had been Chronos and before that, an underground Vigilante who had only called herself Kitten with a wink and a two-fingered salute, a cat eared hoodie pulled over her head with two carrot clips attached to the edge of it.

She'd spent most of the meeting clearly enjoying how flustered she'd managed to get Dream while feeding them information, shifting easily between seriousness and a light-hearted tone that had given Tommy a vague sense of whiplash.

"Oh and tell Mr. Tall Red and Handsome over there to-" She'd made the sign for a phone, eyes bright and teasing on him.

She'd been gone before Tommy could make a fool out of himself in response, flushed horribly red beneath his mask as Dream laughed, head thrown back in the empty warehouse.

There are times Tommy forgets that he's actually sixteen- that it matters when he's spent almost three years as a Hero where he's treated as an adult, relied on and turned to by fellow Heroes and civilians during tragedies and missions.

He doesn't feel like a child.

Except- Wilbur had made him feel young, hadn't he? Like he was allowed to lean against him and shake off responsibilities and just be *Tommy*.

He stares down at his hands, mismatched, one pink and one pale.

"I'm sorry." He jerks up, locking eyes with Faux Pas through the holes of the fox mask. "I heard- it's rare that torture gets involved, even in this business." It's impossible to read his face but the Vigilante keeps tap-tap-tapping, the other hand absently tugging at one of Karl's brown curls. "At least like *this*."

"Like *what*?" Tommy asks flatly.

Faux Pas curls Karl's lock around his finger. "Well, I mean- everyone knows you don't kill, it's not your M.O., and you went as far as to lose your Hero status while protecting Siren, right?" Faux Pas cocks his head. "Anyone can put one and two together, it's not for anything you would have gone against Dream, something happened that night."

Tommy's mouth thins.

"I don't care that much, as far as I'm concerned you could have let that bastard die and the world would have been better without him." Dark, bitter, *personal*. "I'm here for Jester and Nemesis."

"You hate him."

"*Hate* is a strong word," Faux Pas laughs, sinking back. "I don't go wishing for his death but I wouldn't miss him either." His tapping stops, hand raising in a dismissive wave. "But- anyway, the thing is- everyone knows that Warden's actions were senseless. You're one of those people who would sooner die than betray what you stand for, nearly *have*, several times. Perhaps he could have found a way but- it was never about the information you could give him and I think you know that as well."

The same questions repeated again and again.

Bones breaking, skin bruising dark, given just enough food to keep his body from failing as Ponk's body burned through his reserves.

"The picture of you and Nemesis was front page news." Faux Pas's voice lowers, pity creeping into it. "You were already ready to work with the Syndicate and all Warden did was complicate things."

"*Complicate things*." Tommy tastes the words slowly. "*That's* what you call it."

Faux Pas shrugs, Karl blinking hazily with a groan, the blood draining from his face-

"Just calling it--"

Tommy doesn't even contemplate warning him, watching with some sweet satisfaction as Karl turned and puked right into the other Vigilante's lap, an ugly mess of cola and stomach acid that makes Faux Pas shoot straight up, stumbling away with a noise of horror and a stammer that ends in a gag.

"Nononono- " Faux Pas disappears out the door and Tommy just catches a glimpse of a fox tail behind him.

He glances towards Karl who sways, mouth tugging up as their eyes meet. "He was talking too much."

A strange kind of warmth floods through him.

"Thank you," Tommy says, rubbing a hand against his side a bit tiredly but watching carefully as Karl pushed to his feet.

“Is there a place we can talk privately?” Karl asks, fishing the Slimecicle up and bringing him to his chest with a small wobble before finding his footing, looking far less like a mess than he had only moments before, one eye glowing solidly white.

Tommy’s mouth curls behind his mask.

“I know just the spot.”

-

“Sorry,” Karl whispers in embarrassment as Tommy kneels down, letting the Vigilante loop his arm around his shoulders, pink arm curling back to hoist the Vigilante up on his back.

“I’m doing much better but-“

“I get it,” Tommy interrupts. “I really, *really* do.”

Karl drops his chin on his shoulder. “Did he really torture you?” the Vigilante asks in a quiet voice.

“I’m fine.”

“That’s not what I’m asking.”

Tommy stares straight in front, feeling small hands of the Slimecicle hoisting itself up on his shoulder to a small twitch of his fingers.

“He did,” he forces out, finally after a long stretch of silence.

Karl’s arms tightens around him and it’s almost a *hug*- the warmth of the other bleeding through his hoodie as he makes his way down the winding corridors towards the training room Techno had taken him to that morning.

He aches for the way Wilbur had folded around him, chin on top of his head, a cocoon of safety from the rest of the world.

“I’m sorry, had I known-“

“You were already practically killing yourself with your powers,” Tommy cuts him off.

“There’s nothing you could have done so don’t beat yourself up about it.”

Karl’s arms squeezes tighter. “You’re too young for this.”

“Aren’t we all?” Tommy snorts bitterly. “You’re, what, twenty-three? Not exactly up there you know.”

Karl laughs, a quiet tired thing. “In this business, I am.”

“Live fast, die young,” Tommy grunts and it feels, companionable, almost, as Karl huffs a breath against his neck before slouching down heavily on his back.

“Jesus, we’re a mess.”

“At least I’m not bleeding out of my eyeballs.”

“Don’t think I didn’t see the new arm you’ve got there, Red.”

“I’m not the one puking up cola.”

“Oh come on, we both know I did that on *purpose*- “

-

“Oh this place is pretty damn sweet,” Karl says with admiration, peering around the training area from his spot on the middle of the floor.

Slimecicle seats neatly in the palm of his hands, tiny hands grasping onto the tip of a folded finger.

“You’ve never been here?”

Karl shrugs. “I’m not a Syndicate member, and neither is Jester, technically, even if he’s just about as good as one. Old history between him and Blood God kinda... *anyway*, that’s not why we’re here.”

Tommy grabs a bottle of water each from the small fridge against the wall, finding a heap of protein bars and grabbing those as well, stuffing a handful into his pocket after a moment of deliberation and grabbing another one to share before ambling his way over and dropping down with a fold of his legs.

He spreads them out in front of Karl who blinks at him, a small smile tipping at the corner of his mouth as he pulls out a honeynut one before flattening into a more serious one.

“Jester is missing.”

“I’m aware.” Tommy picks one with dry apple bits, peeling it open and biting down. “Siren and Nemesis as well- Schlatt is up to something.”

Karl draws his shoulders tight. “Jester has a past with Schlatt, it’s... messy, to put it kindly. It’s not really my story to tell but- the sooner we get them all out of there, the better.”

“Schlatt gave us a week.”

Tommy breaks off a bit and slips it to the Slimecicle on the table that blinks at him before brightening and pulling it close.

“Six, almost five days now.” Karl rubs a thumb against the protein bar, an anxious tic. “I think- I think Sapnap might be in over his head as well and I’m-“

Hatred, dark and vitriolic, flares through him, wrestling against the hurt, the parts that misses Sapnap so fiercely he doesn’t know what to do with himself.

He had hoped-

“He doesn’t have his powers.”

Condemned so easily in a room filled with his enemies.

“I don’t know what to do,” Karl admits miserably. “I was so sure- it was never supposed to go this far but things are more fucked up than I first thought, apparently.” A brittle laugh. “I heard from Faux Pas that- Sapnap that he told them about your powers and I’m sorry.”

Tommy glances up at the Vigilante, mouth curling behind his mask.

“It was- I know where he was coming from-“

“Do you really?” Tommy interrupts. “Because I *sure as fuck* don’t feel enlightened.”

Karl shakes his head, dressed in a soft white hoodie that’s far too familiar with the little flame emblem over his heart.

“It’s- Sapnap, he trusts, easier than he wants to admit to and he knows- he knows that the Syndicate doesn’t harm child-“

Tommy lurches forward, slapping his palm over Karl’s mouth with a snarl, eyes burning livid red.

“I’m Red Chaos before I’m a *child*,” Tommy hisses, black nails digging into the soft skin of the Vigilante’s cheek. “He had *nothing* that promised my survival and he knows how much fucking trouble Dream would be in if anyone found out about my age!”

Karl’s hand curls around his wrist, not tugging, simply holding it there until Tommy reluctantly eases back with a snap of his teeth.

“I won’t defend it, he can do that on his own.” Karl draws a deep breath, letting it out. “But- he’s not on good terms with Dream at the moment and I believe he was more concerned about your safety than any consequences Dream might face.”

Tommy snorts rudely. “Don’t care, he was being an idiot-“

“He was *desperate*.” Karl’s voice breaks, a terrible thing of a hitched breath that makes Tommy still in place, peering at the older man. “And he’s *right* – you don’t belong in this mess like *holy shit* you were tortured and you’re- we both know you’re too young but the thing is-“ A self-deprecating smile. “Sapnap is the better man out of the two of us because I don’t *care*.”

A strange feeling settles in his chest, heavy with something he doesn’t want to confront.

“I’m still sorry about it,” Karl rubs a sweater pawed hand over his eyes. “Don’t get me wrong, if there was some way around this that doesn’t mean your involvement, I would take it but-“

“Jester means more to you than I do,” Tommy cuts him off and Karl winces. “Yeah, I get that, don’t- I don’t think that makes you a bad person.”

There are lengths he’d go for both Wilbur and Dream that he wouldn’t go for anyone else, after all.

“I love them, I just want them safe and home with me. Both of them.”

“Not easy when one is a Hero and one is a Villain,” Tommy says with a curl of bitter irony.

The Vigilante twists the ends of his sweater paws together anxiously in his lap, brown curls falling down his face, and Tommy realizes, for the first time, that he’s staring at the Vigilante out of his costume.

He looks softer like this, in Sappnap’s hoodie and not dressed up for an interview in sharp colourful suits. Younger, perhaps, just a year younger than Wilbur, his hair unstyled and half-flattened beneath the hood pulled up but resting far back on his head.

His right eye glows soft white, mouth twisting up.

“If you’re using your powers,” Tommy says quietly and Karl jerks, eyes settling on him. “You should eat the bar.”

They regard each other, former Hero and Vigilante.

“Faux Pas didn’t pick up on it, thought it was an after effect of using my powers” Karl says finally, reaching to grab the bar and peeling it back. “Is it that obvious?”

Tommy shrugs. “You seem like the self-sacrificial type.”

“Takes one to know one.” Karl takes a cautious bite, chewing it carefully with a grimace. “Charlie?” The small Slimecicle peers up attentively at the Vigilante. “You can tell him now, there’s no-one else to hear.”

The Slimecicle turns its head to Tommy, eyes locking onto him with a small tilt of its head, studying him curiously.

“Hello Mr Red Chaos. I’m not really meant to be here but- he was very insistent so we’re making an exception.” Its small arms folds across its chest, eyes squinting suspiciously at him. “So just this one time-”

“Is he alive?” Tommy interrupts, heart pounding in his chest. “My slime, is he *alive*?”

There’s a blink, a pause, and then-

“He’s alive,” the Slimecicle says and Tommy sags with the relief that floods through him, hands bunching up tight.

“He didn’t die.”

I didn't fail him.

The Slimecicle regards him curiously.

“He says he’s sorry for leaving you when you were sleeping but he wanted to help.”

“That’s- help?” Tommy repeats distractedly.

The Slimecicle on the table shifts into a kneeling position, brow furrowing in concentration and then-

“I found him!” The excitement bleeds in a hushed whisper from the Slimecicle staring up at him with bright earnestness. “The man you were looking for- I found him!”

Tommy gapes.

“You’re- wait who are you-“

“The Green Man!” Slimecicle interrupts him. “He took your scarf so I hitched a ride!” the slime proclaims proudly.

“He-“ Tommy’s hand darts up to his bare throat, where the neon green scarf he’d made for Dream had gone missing from. “He took it?” he repeats, fingers curling into the blue fabric. “Dream- he took the scarf?” Desperation bleeds into his voice, a naked kind of vulnerability he can’t find himself to hide as he stares down at the slime.

The Slimecicle bobs its small head, mouth in a bright grin and brown eyes warm.

“It seems like not everything is lost,” Karl says, voice soft, cautious, and Tommy’s eyes snaps towards him, a swirl of emotions bleeding heavy inside of him, chest rising and falling with harsh heavy breaths. “Not everything is at it seems.”

“Think about what you did.”

Dream’s parting words.

Carefully Tommy reaches out and the Slimecicle doesn’t protest as he carefully folds his mismatched hands around it to lift it up in the cradle of his palms.

“Thank you,” Tommy chokes out to it, lowering his head in a bow.

“I broke my promise,” Slime says solemnly to him. “I wanted to make it right.”

Tommy draws a sharp breath.

“You more than enough made up for it,” he swears feverishly, drawing back to peer down at the small creature. “You- you’re not in any danger are you?”

Its lips wobbles a bit unsurely. “I don’t like ram man, he’s *mean*, so I hide from him.”

“You see him a lot?” Tommy asks with a frown, stomach twisting. “Is he there with Dream?”

“Sometimes,” the Slime admits to him, small hands clasping together. “Most of the time he’s with the En-forders?”

“Enforcers?” Tommy lifts him closer to his face, urgency threading through him. “The uh- they have golden masks and are all dressed in blue.”

His slime perks up. “Yes, those!”

“That’s-“ He doesn’t quite know what to make of that- there’s no way Dream would feel *threatened* by Enforcers but the fact that he’s being monitored by them? That’s... “That’s not good,” he says and it doesn’t begin to touch the surface of his feelings but- *fuck*.

He sucks a harsh breath, holds it, lets it out.

Focus, he reminds himself. *Ask the important questions first.*

“Is he-“ Tommy licks his lips. “Is he okay? Dream- is he- *does he look okay?*”

His slime stares up at him, green goopy body shifting and moving, brown eyes wide and attentive and-

Vulnerability and weakness, a jumble of emotions from childhood, from growing-up at Dream’s side.

Admiration and love, the overwhelming pride he’d felt when he stepped up at Dream’s side as Red Chaos, a willingness to give everything for his mentor.

It still burns inside of him, spreading through his veins, pounding with the wet beat of his heart.

“When I saw him, before I hid back in the ventilation shaft,” the Slime says gently, “he was petting a cat on the couch and wearing your scarf.”

Tommy sucks a breath, eyes closing shut.

He’s okay. The knowledge thrums through his veins. *He still cares.*

“Of course he is.” His voice is thick, a quiver of his lips caught by teeth and stilled, twisting into a rough snort. “Of course he’s- he’s petting a fucking *cat*. ”

It’s so easy to picture- Dream with his ruffled blond hair, Tommy’s ugly hand-knitted scarf wrapped around his neck and curled up with a cat in his lap, the creature well-fed and pleased and no doubt purring up a storm because his mentor had always had a soft spot for strays.

And yet-

His stomach knots tight because he can’t picture Dream’s face, instead there’s the mask, familiar with the dark dots and smiling mouth stares back at him from the depths of his mind.

He shakes it away roughly.

“Is there- is there anything more you can tell me?” he fumbles out. “Anything you think might help?”

Slimecicle tips his small head.

“Are you going to help Jester?”

Tommy blinks at him, glancing slowly up at the Vigilante who sits across him with his right eye glowing eerie white, a drop of blood curling down to drip from his chin onto hands clasped tight in his lap.

“I am,” Tommy responds, resolve settling tight in his chest.

Slimecicle lifts a finger up to him, eyes serious.

“Pinky promise?”

Tommy draws a breath, shifting the slime into his left hand and solemnly pressing the pad of his right pinky against the other’s.

“Pinky promise.”

-

“Here.” Tommy jerks as a bag of blood slaps down on the table in front of him, slowly glancing up at Techno. “We’re heading into the Pit tomorrow, and you’re coming along, so you have a few hours to get a handle on it.”

“... Do I want to know where you got it from?” Tommy asks dubiously as he stretches his fork forward to give it a poke.

“Willingly donated,” the Villain tells him with a curling grin of sharp tusks. “I’m sure Nemesis won’t mind too much that we found an alternate use for her donated blood.”

His eyes widens, stilling where he sits.

“Isn’t she like a mermaid hybrid or something?” he asks cautiously.

“Distantly, should be fine.” The red cape sweeps behind him, golden crown catching with a distracting gleam from the lamp lit up above them. “Angel has offered to help you out with it so you can go have fun with that.”

Offered is laughable. They both know he doesn’t have a choice in the matter.

“Are we really going into the Pit?” Tommy asks wearily, excitement bubbling cautiously beneath it. “They’re not exactly a fan of Heroes down there.”

“And why is that I wonder?” Techno asks wryly, reaching into the cupboards and grabbing a cup, pouring generously from the coffee Tommy had made a bit absently while mulling over the words of Slimecicle and Karl.

The Villain takes a sip, pausing visibly where he stands.

“You made this?”

“Yeah,” Tommy answers distractedly as he paws the bag of blood a bit awkwardly into his lap. “Why?”

“It’s good.”

“Don’t sound so fucking surprised,” Tommy snorts, tucking the bag beneath his arm. “I don’t drink the stuff but I know how to make a mean cup of coffee.”

Techno turns to lean back against the counter, red eyes lingering on him.

"I heard Chronos is here."

"What about it?"

"You two have a fun conversation?"

Tommy throws him a look. "He's half out of it and threw up all over Faux Pas before falling asleep."

Techno's eyes gleams knowingly. "And the slime told you nothing, of course."

"Of course," Tommy says and they both know that he's lying.

Surprisingly, the Villain doesn't call him out on it.

“You’re about Siren’s height,” Techno says instead, lowering the cup down.

“Yeah?” Tommy grumps. “What about it?”

“You can’t go into the Pit as Red Chaos.”

Tommy pauses.

“You’re joking.”

Techno’s grin is sharp and foreboding and Tommy gives him a horrified look.

-

“Whose fucking idea what it to dress me up as Siren?” Tommy kicks the door to the training room shut behind him, bag of blood dropped down on the floor. “Because no one is gonna fucking buy it you know.”

Phil shifts, black rings rustling on his back and eerie blue eyes settling on him with a bird like tilt of the man’s head.

“You can’t-“

“Go into the pit as Red Chaos,” Tommy interrupts rudely. “I fucking *know* that.”

Phil raises a brow at him, emerald caught in a gentle net of gold where it hangs from his ear.

“You’re gonna stand out no matter what you do, mate,” the Villain comments with an easy step taken towards him, dark amusement visible in the coil of his voice and mantling of his wings. “The Pit is our playground, Heroes don’t belong in it.”

Tommy bares his teeth behind his mask, nose flaring.

“Everyone knows that Siren is-“

“How do you think the people of L’Manberg are going to react when someone dressed as Siren, wielding Nemesis’ powers, appears?” Phil interrupts him, head tilting the other way with a rustle of dark feathers.

Tommy folds his arms, skin prickling uncomfortable as the other steps closer but refusing to move.

“They’ll be confused.”

“And?” Phil presses, eyes bright and impossible to look away from.

“They- they won’t know what to think,” Tommy ventures cautiously as Phil halts in front of him, wings casting their shadow upon him where he stands. “People will start to doubt Schlatt and-“

The realization dawns with a sharp inhalation.

“You’re aiming to lure Schlatt out,” he breathes. “With me as the *bait*. ”

“Oh little Sparrow, you’re much more than just bait,” Phil assures him, crow feet visible with the curving grin behind the Villain’s mask. “You’ll be the *chaos* in which we *act*. ”

“In the midst of chaos-“ Tommy starts.

“There is also opportunity,” Phil finishes with a gleam of his eyes. “I see we understand each other.”

“Yeah,” Tommy says with a grin that slowly bares teeth behind his mask. “I think we understand each other *perfectly*. ”

Chapter End Notes

bruh, life has been keeping me hella busy but this is a two day project of finally finding some time to sit down and write it out and it's currently 2 am but it's so worth it

and look at this, you guys are *practically* getting crimebois- tommy is gonna be playing dress up as siren, i'm sure that can only bring good fortunes :)

...

:))))))

hope you are having a better day/night than tommy wherever you are out there in the world<3

-

If you're interested there's a [Hush Now Discord](#) that tends to go *brrrrr* with the theories in designated channels and also have a lot of fun chatter and chill people on top of scoops of chaos with my lovely mods<3

You can find me on **tumblr** here: [corpse-art](#)
And I'm also on **twitter** now here: [corpsey_art](#)

I post a one hour countdown on all my social medias for a new chapter update if you're interested in such a thing :)

-

DUDES. We have new Hush Now art!! They're all amazing. Go and give them all so much love<3

(And if I ever miss linking your art- pls let me know!! I try to make sure I keep track of everything but I am but human)

[The Villain by PlantChecker](#) art

[Raccooninnit by munch_neko](#) art

[Hero or Villain? by marissnot](#) art

[Early mornings by Mothlampss](#) art

[POV: you're Schlatt by maze_is_dot](#) art

[Slime! by DomdomDraka](#) art

[Hush Now Webtoon by Lunariusthemoth](#) art

[FANART MASTERPOST](#)

Chapter 37

Chapter Notes

Someone requested an overview of the known secret identities so I'll fill this out properly at a later date and then post with each chapter:

Tommy - Red Chaos

Heroes:

Dream - Dream

404 - George

Valorant - Sapnap

Royal - Eret

Rose - Hannah

Schlatt - Schlatt (formerly Judge)

Villains:

Angel of Death - Phil

Blood God - Techno

Siren - Wilbur

Warden - Sam

Lethe - Ranboo

Judge - Tubbo

Jester - Quackity

Nemesis - Niki

Eris - Eret

Vigilantes:

Faux Pas - Fundy

Chronos - Karl

Kitten - TinaKitten

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The Angel of Death stands across him, regarding him quietly as he carefully opens the blood bag, staring down at it with his heart thumping wet and heavy inside his chest.

There are small tusks poking from his gums, a sliver of pink skin on his heel, his entire right arm that of a piglin hybrid and his back a network of scars where wings had tried to grow, and failed.

He has no idea what drinking Nemesis' blood will do to him.

How far will I go for Dream, for Wilbur?

The answer comes easy as he unlatches the seam of his mask, breaking off the plastic seal with a twist and dropping it to the floor.

As far as I need to.

“I’m here,” Phil reminds him as he clamps down on the bag and tips his head back. “If anything goes wrong I’ll handle it.”

The familiar taste of metal spills into his mouth, thick where it trickles down his throat with one swallow and then another before pinching it shut, shoving it out blindly to the Villain who takes it as Tommy forces his mask shut with a groan that bubbles wet and thick.

His hands wraps around his throat, hunching on himself, forcing one breath after the other, regulating the rise and fall of his chest with careful counting as panic surges through him with the constricting grip of his airways.

He twitches, the skin on his throat burning, sweat beading on his brow.

An arm circles around his back, lowering him down slowly as his legs wobbles, gagging with a cough.

“Focus on your breathing.” Phil’s voice feels distant through the pulsing of his blood and the burn around his right arm raising hot right where the godmark circles around it.

Fingers pries his hands away as his skin splits, blood running down the sides of his throat as gills tears through his skin.

The godmark on his wrist pulses, golden light twining up his arm with a distantly rumbling curl of dark amusement that isn’t his.

You don’t learn do you, thief

It’s my power, Tommy thinks furiously back, gritting his teeth as water beads on the inside of his throat, trickling down his lungs and slowly filling them up with every harsh drawn breath until he has no choice but to close his mouth as the gills on his throat flares, filtering oxygen with the swirl of liquid in his lungs. *And this blood doesn’t fucking belong to you so you can shove it.*

I suppose it’s impressive, the way your body adapts and overcomes

The Blood God’s voice drips with malice as Tommy struggles with the muscles that filters air far down his throat, gills fluttering with every strangled inhalation.

You won’t keep these ones so why bother?

Why do anything in life.

Tommy pries his eyes open, hazily focusing on Phil who is down on one knee in front of him, blue eyes shimmering bright with interest.

Because I fucking want to, why else?

Dark amusement bleeds through him, pulsing with the beating of his heart as laughter echoes loud enough to make him keen quietly, water bubbling up and licking at the back of his throat as Phil's hand frames the side of his face, tilting his chin up, mouth moving but no words registering.

And what happens the day your body won't be able to keep up with the change?

Then I'll die knowing that at least I tried

The godmark sizzles and glows, wrapping up his arm and coiling around him and Phil's hand draws back as if burnt as gold crawls through seam in his mask, burning hot against his throat with the parting of his lips.

And what if I let you keep them? What would you do?

Curiosity that bleeds thick through him, rattling through his bones and aching his gums.

I don't need you, Tommy hisses back, jerking his head furiously, golden threads cut off with the harsh snap of his teeth and a clenching of his jaw. *So fuck off!*

Laughter that coils deep enough to make his eyes water, intruding on his very being as the gold slowly draws back, unwinding like thin snakes to circle around his wrist before slowly sealing back around his wrist.

You humans are weak

You can claim you don't need me all you want

But at the end of the day

You'll come crawling on your hands and knees begging for my help, whelp

Tommy's breathing levels out, clarity snapping back with a sharp whooshed breath and a bubbling breath.

The Angel of Death raises a brow. "What was that about?"

"Gods fucking suck," Tommy tells him, slamming his palm against his mask and unlatching the seam of it before promptly leaning forward and throwing up water.

-

Tommy trudges to his assigned room drenched that night, the sides of his throat aching and fingers tingling, a cool chill clinging to his skin.

It's late and Phil had warned him that he had four hours to get rest before he needed to be awake and ready to get dressed up as Siren when he stumbled from the training room.

He peels his clothes off, letting them fall in a heap on the floor and trading them for the soft sweatpants and t-shirt he finds folded at the end of the bed with a bit of a wrestle and rough tugging before it settles against his wet skin.

He puts the feather back on around his neck, tucking it beneath his shirt before ambling his way into the bathroom, closing the door shut, drawing a breath and raising his head to look into the mirror.

His hair is drenched, stubborn curls sticking out like little cowlicks, but his eyes stares back at him bright and eager from the rush of adrenaline that came from going up against the Angel of Death himself.

It had been... strange..

Different.

Tommy reaches up to remove his mask, dropping it into the sink with a harsh inhalation through his nose, fingers ghosting gently over the growing stubble on his cheeks as he breathes out, feeling the gentle prickling of it with a twist in his chest as he studies himself.

Training with Phil had been *different* from Dream, *different* from Techno.

It was paced, methodical, the man's eyes sharp on him but quick to praise him when he was doing something right, which had left him feeling wrong-footed with heat creeping up his cheeks as he struggled to find the rhythm of it.

At the end of the day, beyond the fear, beyond the emotions that tangled in the knowledge that he was Wilbur's father, there's an admiration for what the Angel was capable of, even in its cruelty.

There's an effortless and hard ingrained deadly beauty in the quiet maneuvering of the man, wings that should be getting in the way moving easily out of his range, careful to always keep his back away from Tommy as he struggled for control of Nemesis' powers.

They'd quickly found out that it was harder for him to reign it back than the opposite- the water eager to rush out, untamed and chaotic, a contrast to the grace and control Nemesis had wielded it with where easy motions of her hands and fingers had made it rush to form the hand catching him.

More than once Phil's wings had carried him up high, safe as Tommy was left drenched when his control had faltered.

Someone had been smart enough to install drains along the sides of the room, the water disappearing quick down them, allowing the Villain to land back down with amusement glittering clear in his eyes as he regarded Tommy's wet form.

He's glad he'd had the forethought to remove his shoes at least.

He lifts his chin, tilting his head, gauze pads thick on either side of his throat where his body had rejected the gills after Nemesis powers had run their course, Phil wrapping them up at the

end of the session.

His tail flicks behind him.

Twelve minutes. That's how long Nemesis powers had lasted before his body tried to reject them before he took another swallow of the blood.

Better than he'd expected.

He rubs a hand against his neck, muscles aching.

In some ways he had been lucky that Nemesis powers hadn't done more. From what Phil had said she was very distantly a mer hybrid, allowing her to breathe under the water she wielded.

His body had grown gills that had and then scales down his neck that had simply peeled away, shimmering red where they'd fallen to the floor.

"I need to shave," he tells himself a bit absently, his own voice sounding strange after days of hearing nothing but the metallic echo of his voice changer and he bares small tusks with a grimace.

He drags a hand through his wet hair with a snort at himself before turning the water on, reaching for the soap and rinsing his mask from the old dried blood clinging to it.

-

There are certain realisations that crawls uncomfortably beneath his skin as he shoves his right arm beneath his pillow before flopping his head down on it, making sure it was out of sight with a curl of pink fingers and black nails.

Things he doesn't want to think about.

There's a bite mark low on his neck where Techno's tusk and teeth had torn him open, lingering phantom aches from the two weeks locked in that miserable room with only the stale smell of his own rot to keep him company between *sessions*, and his throat feels swollen and pained where the gills had torn his skin open to settle in his skin.

Emotions crawls beneath his skin, humiliation, loss, loneliness, an unsurety of his place in the world, all too aware that things are crumbling around him and he's scrabbling to hold on, to not break apart.

He can't afford it.

Can't afford the weakness that wraps wretched and thick around his heart with dread when he thinks of Dream, a Hero, and Wilbur, a Villain.

Can't afford the fear of what he's becoming with the taste of blood on his tongue and instincts he doesn't understand that purrs with the press of his thumb against the gold around his index finger.

Can't afford to linger on what's becoming of Red Chaos in the eyes of the world.

He draws a shuddering breath, pulling the cover up over his head and curling tight on himself, tail wrapping around his leg.

It's going to be okay, he thinks to himself, fiercely, desperately.

It has to be.

Please.

-

"Do you ever wonder what you'll do once you stop being a Hero?" George had asked him in a rare moment between them, not bothering to look up from the bright screen of his laptop.

Tommy, sixteen, had sat curled up in the armchair, his foot is wrapped in bandages and he's in shorts as to not aggravate the wound, pen absently being twirled and a mission report thick where it rests against his thighs.

"Not really," Tommy had admitted, leaning back into the soft cushion. *"I'll just- stick with Dream, I guess."*

He'd tried to picture it- a life beyond Heroism but his mind draws short because it's his *world*.

What he'd bet his all on becoming, proud to stand at Dream's side.

"I'll figure something out, if it ever comes to that, I guess," he'd fumbled out when George glances up, brow raised at him. *"It's not- look, it's not exactly something one plans for in this business, yeah so- fuck off with that look."*

"I'm not sure who I want to strangle more- you or Dream," George laughs, hand dragging through his thick brown hair, eyes far away. *"He gave me the same goddamn answer."*

Tommy had snorted.

"He's married to his work, what the fuck did you expect?"

"Some sanity."

Tommy had hesitated but- *"What about you then? What are your plans once you stop being a Hero?"*

George had drawn a breath, letting out with a huff aimed towards the stubborn strange of curling strands that keeps drifting down over his eye.

"I'm getting out of here."

"Out of L'Manberg?" Tommy had asked, startled.

“Yeah,” George had agreed, his accent a pleasant drawl. “I’ll get myself an island in the middle of nowhere or something, drag Dream and Sapnap along, leave the whole Hero and Villains business behind for a well-deserved vacation.”

“Oh,” Tommy had managed in response, unsure what to feel. “That- that sounds nice.”

The older man had studied him for a long moment before George’s mouth had tugged up, a rare thing these days, shadows dark beneath both their eyes. *“I suppose, I wouldn’t be opposed to you coming along as well.”*

“Yeah?”

“Mm-hmm.”

“That sounds nice.” Tommy had wrapped his arms around his knees, resting his chin on top of them. *“I’ve always wanted to see the ocean.”*

-

“I need to borrow a razor,” Tommy grumps, flopping down on the couch and reaching forward to snag an apple for himself before slouching back.

It’s early morning, the world still quiet, and Tommy is itching to get out of the Syndicate hide-out.

He’s going into The Pit.

Eris tips their head, crowned and impeccably dressed where they sit next to Techno who doesn’t look too concerned about the fact that the other Villain could wither him down with a simple touch.

Tommy isn’t entirely certain why it makes him twitchy but there it is, gnawing beneath his skin.

The only other two people are Phil and Faux Pas who is doing his absolute best to press into the corner of the couch he’s sharing with the Angel of Death whose wings span out around him in a curl forward.

There’s a pile of clothes folded on the table, a metal mask resting on top of a red beanie and gun holstered beside it, the Tree of L’Manberg a bright contrast on the handle of it with its white twisting branches.

“I see we’re not wasting any time.” Tommy unlocks his mask, taking a satisfying bite of his apple despite the nerves that are crowding tight enough to make him want to vomit.

He knows better than go out in a mission on an empty stomach.

“No time to waste,” Phil says with a lingering look. “You’ll be heading into the Pit with-“

“*Me*, Faux Pas and Eris,” Techno interrupts, leaning forward, elbow on his knees and voice a rumble.

Tommy takes another bite before pushing his mask shut.

“That so?”

He glances at Eris and Faux Pas, two whose secret identities he still knows nothing about and has no leverage against.

He’d almost preferred the Warden.

Almost.

“You got a problem with that?” Faux Pas challenges.

“Why would I?” Tommy snorts. “I don’t even know you.”

“Faux Pas here is your ticket into the Pit,” Phil says before the Vigilante can muster a response. “Eris and Blood God are already marked to enter but you’re going to be a bit trickier to get in.”

Tommy frowns, glancing at the square fox mask.

“Right,” he says warily. “I’m entrusting myself to you, then.”

Faux Pas twitches, fingers stilling in their nervous counting, and the Vigilante stares at him for a long moment. “You’re weird,” Faux Pas informs him. “Sure, *entrust yourself* to me.” His tone drips of sarcasm.

“Play nice, Faux,” Eris hums, one leg folded elegantly over the other, golden cape swapped for a simple black one. “We’re all working together here.”

“As if, everyone knows that Red Chaos works for no one but *Dream*,” Faux Pas spits the name out and Tommy’s hackles rises sharply, mouth curling sharp with an itching of his gums. “I’ll still do it, don’t get me wrong, but I’m only here because I owe Jester one and we need the guy now that he *conveniently* got his powers back.”

“Yeah, real fucking *convenient* there was an axe to chop my arm off with,” Tommy growls to a sharp glance from Techno that he ignores. “You got a problem with me?”

“Heroes don’t belong in the Pit!” Faux Pas’ voice picks up in volume, hands spreading out. “We already have Enforcers where they don’t belong and *now* I’m supposed to be happy about bringing in the loyal mutt of the Number One Hero? Hah!”

“Dream wouldn’t-“ The response is instinctual but Phil makes a sharp noise that makes him jerk, hiccupping on the words with a startled glance as he stills in pace, heart pounding as he stares at the Villain.

“Easy now,” Phil’s voice is a dark warning but something like satisfaction flashes in those eerie blue eyes when they meet his, gone so fast that Tommy wonders if he’d imagined it as the Angel looks away. “Blood God, why don’t you take Red and get him dressed up, you can brief him enroute.”

Tommy swallows back vitriol as he rises, tail flicking sharply behind him as he turned on his heel.

Behind him he hears the quiet steps of the Blood God who pauses to grab Siren’s clothing before following him.

-

“You’re in the wrong place if you’re going to get defensive anytime someone criticizes Dream,” Techno says as he steps into the room, door closing shut behind him. “The Pit hates Heroes, you’re going to hear plenty of that.”

“I know that!” Tommy growls, frustration bubbling in his chest even as he desperately smothers it down. “I know,” he says quieter, staring down at Siren’s mask on his bed.

It’s a simple metallic thing, reminiscent of his own, thicker around the edges with blue metallic spots that patterns out almost like freckles beneath the eyes.

Unlike his own though, there’s square pieces to settle over the ears and from them a black band that straps it tight in place.

Siren’s mask.

Wilbur’s mask.

Techno huffs, stepping closer, and Tommy flinches in surprise when a heavy hand lands on his shoulder, sliding up to squeeze against the back of his neck as his muscles knots tense in response, a shiver running through him but-

The warmth is strangely grounding where he stands, chest expanding and lowering too fast.

A rumbling noise, a low *chuff-chuff-chuff* makes his next breath filter into his lungs with a rasp, eyes squeezing shut as he centers himself.

“You know how to use a razor?” Techno asks him after a long moment, hand sliding off.

“What kind of question is that, Blade?” Tommy grunts, peeling his eyes open and glancing side-ways and up at the other. “Of course I know how to-“

Techno flips out a familiar foldable razor out in response and Tommy’s mouth clicks shut, struggling desperately against the surprise that wants to bleed out over his face because-

It’s identical to Dream’s, down the oaken wood in the handle, scratches visible but carefully polished over, the care obvious.

“A friend- well, I thought he was a friend, taught me how to shave.” Dream’s face is hard to read, his thumb dragging over the wooden shaft of the razor with a twist of his mouth as it covers up the letter at the very end. *“It doesn’t matter now- he’s gone.”*

The only thing that sets them apart is the small, elegant *T* instead of *D*.

“I didn’t want to do it, I didn’t want to do it- you have to believe me, Tommy, you have to-“

“HE BETRAYED ME!”

Something wretched, something broken, the loss of something Dream struggles to grasp at.

“I trusted him-“

“I thought-“

“I should have known better, he always told me-“

“He was my friend- or I thought he was I don’t- I can’t- he left me Tommy, he left me and now all I have is you-“

“Maybe I was the fool along, for thinking that he actually cared about me but I just wanted-“

“Please, I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry-“

“It’s all my fault.”

Techno raises a brow at his silence.

“Yeah,” Tommy forces out, blood drained from his face and head lowering to shadow it. “I know how to use one of those.”

-

Mask unlatched Tommy carefully tilts his head, the blade angled to drag up his skin, rinsing it carefully between each cut, strands washed down the drain from the turned-on faucet, freeing his face of the scraggly growth that he’d done his best to ignore.

He wipes his face dry with a towel, blade cleaned and carefully folded back as he draws a shuddering breath, palms curling around the edge of the porcelain as he leans forward, pressing his forehead against the mirror, eyes squeezing shut.

“Fuck,” he whispers with feeling, mouth quivering, something like a laugh choked in the back of his throat. *“Fuck.”*

He drags himself up, turning towards the hair dye kit and snatching it up before twisting around and dropping down on the toilet seat.

The woman on the cover of it stares back at him, hair flowing dramatically around her face.

Like most products there's a stark lack of representation and when he peels open the instructions he grimaces at the *Warning: Not Safe For Hybrid Use*.

He debates shouting something at Techno but the words curls and dies on his tongue, silenced.

"It's all my fault." Dream's voice heavy with grief and regret ghosts at the back of his mind and the paper crumbles harshly with the clenching of his fingers.

He blows a harsh breath.

The fucking *odds*-

"Fuck," he mouths to himself, tasting it carefully as he crumples the paper up into a small ball, knuckles clenching white.

What am I even supposed to do with this information, Tommy wonders to himself, staring down at his mismatched hands, bare feet pressed flat against the cool tiles of the bathroom floor.

So- Techno was Dream's... friend.

Someone who had betrayed his mentor? *Fuck*. Tommy doesn't know enough to even start guessing and-

Had Techno left Dream in the program? Was that- fourteen, Dream had been *fourteen* that day when he came home, desperation and grief and anger twisting him up so heavily that Tommy hadn't known how to help.

He flicks the ball of paper into the trash.

It's between Techno and Dream and it's not like I can tell Dream anything right now anyway.

Tommy thumbs the golden ring, pressing it in a circle around until he's back to staring at the ruby, bright red like a mockery of the colour that had spilled over the blue of his eyes.

He presses his thumb flat down over it, nail black and skin pink.

Can I use it?

-

Tommy jerks when he gets a look at himself in the mirror, brown curls instead of familiar blond punching the air out of his chest as he stares at himself, fingers reaching up to brush hesitantly over his fringe that had grown long after two months of ignoring it.

His eyes are still blue, not brown, but-

He looks like-

He swallows thickly, fumbling for his mask and pressing it over his mouth, sealing it shut before clearing his throat and slamming his fist against the door.

“Hey Blade do you-” his voice breaks and he draws a harsh breath, pressing his forehead against the door. “Do you have any clippers?”

“... Clippers?”

“Or scissors,” Tommy squeezes out.

There’s a moment of silence, Tommy’s lips trembling where he stands.

“Yeah,” Techno grunts after a moment. “I can get you that.”

-

It’s a fumble of tense fingers, head awkwardly angled to drag the clippers up his neck and sides, fringe impatiently brushed aside to make sure it didn’t accidentally get caught.

There’s old knots and tangles that the clippers tug painfully at and he yanks impatiently until they blade tears through them, eyes prickling and heart pounding loudly inside his chest.

Done, he drops it in the sink, beside the hair curler and scissors and tools from the hair dye kit.

His heart squeezes tight as he stares at the Wilbur look-alike in the mirror, trembling fingers brushing gently over the now brown messy curls of his hair with emotions tangling too thick inside of him.

He’d always thought he’d looked a bit like Dream- both of their hair blond and Tommy stretching out to his full height beside his mentor in the mirror to measure at 6’3, just like him.

But where Wilbur is taller, older, it only makes Tommy feel like he’s staring at a younger version of his friend.

He takes a step back, sucking a sharp breath before turning slowly around to look at the clothes piled on top of the laundry basket.

His mask drops to the floor with a press of the heel of his palm, cluttering loudly, and he reaches for the dark red beanie first, pulling it down over his head and brushing out a few curls of his fringe to make them stick out.

The white dress shirt is next, the sleeves a bit too long but cuffed securely, and he follows the buttons carefully down, hands smothering down the fabric with a small tremble.

The pants are dark, made of a sturdy fabric, bunching a bit awkwardly even as he does his best to fold the bottom hems along his calves into the thick brown leather boots as he secures them on tightly to make up for the small size difference.

It's a bit of a fumble to figure out how to get the gun holster in place but he gets it secured to the side of his thigh after some impatient turning of the brown leather straps and the fingerless glove is tugged on his left hand, a full cover one for his right that he flexes carefully.

The blue coat gets swung over his shoulder, tugged down on his shoulders, finger brushing down the golden buttons beside the red trim with a pause, eyes closing at the scent of sandalwood and smoke still clinging to the collar his nose brushes against with a turn of his head.

He wraps his arms around his chest, glancing up at the mirror, seeing himself reflected back, his face pale, and he looks-

He looks like a *child* playing dress-up, like a younger Siren, and the thought of- the *question* of how young Wilbur had been when he decided to be Siren, itches at the back of his mind.

He reaches for the mask, thumb dragging over the pattern of blue freckle-like dots against the black metal before he turns it around, pulling the strap over his head and pressing the mask over his mouth, fingers sliding until he finds the small dip that seals it against his skin with a *hiss*.

He straightens up, giving himself a shake, and it's *easy* to recall the arrogant nonchalance of Siren's body language, a bit harder to untense his muscles to copy it with a roll of his neck and a tilt of his head before he allows himself to focus properly on the mirror.

His youth, thankfully, is less glaring with the mask on, easy to mistake for older with the dark shadows and strain that clings tiredly to him, brown curls brushing out over his eye.

"You done?" Techno calls through the door, boredom clear in his voice. "There's contact lenses in the coat pocket."

Tommy's hand darts down, feeling the small square box and fishing it out.

Brown, not gold, is settled carefully over blue.

Siren, not Red Chaos, stares back at him from the mirror.

-

Wilbur sucks a sharp breath as his head is yanked back up from the water, fingers tangled painfully in his hair and back awkwardly bent as he coughs, chest heaving as he sucks air desperately down his lungs, water dripping down the front of his chest.

His cheeks stain red with humiliation as he feels a rough gloved hand yank at his bicep, the other scrubbing down roughly at his hair, squeezing his eyes shut as he feels the lather of the shampoo drip dangerously close to his eyes.

"I have- a careful laid out plan for my hair you know," Wilbur splutters out, blindly struggling to stay on his knees, boxers clinging awkwardly wet to his hips in the ice-cold water. "You could learn something from me-"

His head gets dunked down unceremoniously, barely managing to catch a quick sharp inhalation through his lips before a hand curled tight around his neck, keeping him under while rinsing his hair and he forces himself not to panic, to count carefully while straining with the arch of his back.

Sooner than he expects his head once again breaks the surface and he sits, his chest is bare and shivers painful, breath rattling.

“Is that-“ Wilbur coughs out. “Is that the best you can do?” His shoulders aches from the clamping of iron around his wrist that keeps them pinned behind them, his powers refusing to respond even as he grasps desperately for them.

“You want it *harder*?” Schlatt mocks, pressing down until his chin touches against the surface of the water, Wilbur’s muscles straining in response with a blooming of panic, knees aching. “You don’t look so high and mighty now, do you, *Siren*. More like a wet *kitten*.”

“Get me out of these chains,” Wilbur grits out. “And we can see just how *high and mighty* I can look.”

Schlatt laughs, yanking him back roughly out of the tub and onto the floor and Wilbur bites down on a yelp as he lands on his arms.

He twists awkwardly on his side, glowering at the Villain who raises a brow at him, gloves removed nonchalantly and fancy shoes making a point of stepping around the water that had splashed out on the floor in his struggles.

“As much as I enjoy your new rugged look,” Schlatt says, stepping over to the counter. “You were starting to smell.”

Wilbur grimaces at his back, pressing down awkwardly with his shoulder to heave himself up into a sitting position, legs sprawled out in front of him and shoulders falling forward, the weakness threading a flare of panic that he smothers down in favour of a roughish grin.

“Am I offending your delicate sensibilities, princess?” he drawls, watching warily as Schlatt pulled out a drawer to riffle through. “I always thought you Heroes were meant to be made from stronger stuff.”

Like Tommy, Wilbur thinks to himself and it’s as much a prayer as it is belief.

“Do you know where we are?” Schlatt asks instead of responding.

A rectangular wooden box is placed on the marble counter.

“There’s no signs if you hadn’t noticed,” Wilbur says, twisting to catch an itch on his shoulder with a rough brush against his beard.

“You’re in the apartment of the Number One Hero that he shares with his *mutt*.”

Wilbur’s jaw clenches tight but Schlatt’s back is towards him, the Hero blind to the rage that settles dark in his eyes.

“For someone who is so keen to get your hands on Red Chaos you don’t seem to like him that much,” Wilbur drawls mockingly.

Guilt gnaws at him, at the last words Tommy had heard him say, calling him a *dog*.

Schlatt’s dark eyes settles on him, curling horns circling red with his power and smoke drifting out from the corners his mouths with a sharp curl of his mouth.

“Oh quite the opposite, I have nothing but the outmost respect for Red Chaos.” Schlatt waves his hand, leaning back against the counter, the heel of his palm pressing down just in front of the box. “His kind of loyalty is rare in this business, *valuable*, likened perhaps only to that of the Syndicate.” A beat. “You, Angel and Blood God are pretty close, aren’t you?”

Dark eyes lingers knowingly on him.

“They’ll do anything to get you back,” Schlatt continues when he doesn’t answer, his shoulders drawn tight. “*Everyone* knows that.”

And Wilbur *does*.

Tommy is clever; he reminds himself, wet and aching where he sits bound on the bathroom floor, water dripping from his hair and curling down his skin. *A survivor*.

But Tommy is also just a child, at the end of the day.

Trust wasn’t something Tommy offered easily and Wilbur had treasured what little he got from dark weary eyes.

He knows that it’s unlikely that Tommy would have revealed his identity to Techno and Phil but he can’t help but feverishly pray that he’s *wrong*.

“Is it such a foreign concept for you? To work with people you trust?” Wilbur bends to shake his head, throwing his head back to get the fringe out of his face, head tilting with a grin that is more teeth than lip. “It’s almost as if, oh I don’t *know*, the Hero Society might be more corrupt than it wants the public to know?”

“You would know, wouldn’t you Wilbur *Soot*.” Wilbur is careful not to let the reaction show on his face but Schlatt’s grin stretches wider. “That’s a pretty name- inherited it from your mother, didn’t you?”

His spine goes rigid. “Don’t you-“

“Talk about your *bitch* of a mother?” Schlatt interrupts, blowing out a breath of smoke with a roll of his shoulders. “She hid you well, I’ll give her that, but it was only a matter of time before someone put the pieces together.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Wilbur forces out, weaker than he meant, heartbeat loud in his ears.

Schlatt opens his mouth but there's a twist of the handle and they both snap to the door as Dream steps inside, drawing it shut behind him with a quiet *click*.

The mask with the two black dots and a smile raises to focus on Schlatt who claps his hands together.

"About time! Poor *Wil* here was getting cold."

Wilbur stares at the man responsible for Tommy being a Hero at fourteen, nails clawing into his skin behind his back.

"Dream," he drawls out mock joy. "Pleasure seeing you again! I was starting to wonder if you'd leave me all in my lonesome with just *Schlatt* here for company."

The box is thrown by Schlatt, caught easily by Dream who pauses, gloved fingers curling gently around the box.

"Problem?" Schlatt challenges, the smirk on his face ugly as one hand dipped into his pocket, pulling out a metal case and popping it open, drawing out a cigar.

"Where did you get this?" Dream's voice is hard to read, barely there tension visible in the hitch of his shoulders.

"Punz picked it up for me." Schlatt presses the tip of his finger against the end of the cigar with a sizzle, finger glowing until it caught and lightened up, smoke drifting lazily.

"Wouldn't give me any information but agreed to run a simple errand for me." A twirl of the cigar. "I didn't really see the point of paying something I'm finding out in- oh, just a few more days now."

Dream doesn't respond, fingers curling tighter around the box, but Wilbur jerks his head up, staring at Schlatt who rolls the cigar with a grin.

"Oh you almost look *worried* there," Schlatt laughs, head thrown back. "You should be more concerned about yourself than someone else." He pushes away from the counter.

The Number One Hero stands quiet as Schlatt slaps a hand against his shoulder.

"You know the deal," Schlatt grins, ugly and cruel, hand squeezing down tight. "Take good care of Wil here for me." A last look over his shoulder. "Make sure he looks *pretty* for the masses."

Another pat and then Schlatt was waltzing out, humming to himself, the reek of the cigar clinging to the air.

Wilbur stares at Dream who gently traces his thumb over the wooden box, looking small where he stands without Red Chaos as his shadow.

Without *Tommy*.

Dark ugly possessive satisfaction threads through him.

“He’s still watching us,” Dream says finally.

“I know,” Wilbur grits back as the Hero takes a step towards him and then another. “I’m going to kill you,” he promises the Hero as Dream sinks down on one knee in front of him. “He loves you and *you*- you fucking abandoned him.”

A gloved hand sinking into the back of his hair and pulling his head harshly back with a wince and Wilbur grasps desperately for his powers, finding *nothing*.

“He didn’t deserve it,” Wilbur heaves out, chest tight and humiliation burning heavy through him. “*You* didn’t deserve *him*.”

A wooden box clutters to the ground, a razor grasped with care, an awkward childish *T* visible before Dream’s hand covers it.

“I know,” Dream says simply.

Chapter End Notes

HALT. STOP. LOOK HERE:

PlantChecker did an absolutely amazing job with designing the official mask of Siren for Hush Now so go check out her profile and all her other lovely art and give her some love from me because I couldn't have done it without her! Very genuinely just - amazing thanks for the help, Plant<3 I adore it to death

It can be found here:

[Siren's Mask by PlantChecker](#)

Shout-out to my beloved dewdrop for being oh so clever for giving me the shaving idea for Wilbur this chapter - the contrast was very fun to play with and, as a bonus, you guys got Wilbur content two chapters earlier than planned :3

Mans got scrubbed down like a feral cat, dignity a bit down the drains, so to say

Meanwhile Tommy is doing just *fine* with his new style :)

Also, just to catch any questions on it - Tommy is closer resembling Wilbur Soot than Siren atm because colouring his skin blue would have been a hassle and when Siren's powers are off his are brown, not gold, so- yeah. Hence the contacts.

Did I speedwrite this? Yes. I hope you guys enjoy it :)

-

If you're interested there's a [Hush Now Discord](#) that tends to go *brrrrr* with the theories in designated channels and also have a lot of fun chatter and chill people on top of

scoops of chaos with my lovely mods<3

You can find me on **tumblr** here: [corpse-art](#)
And I'm also on **twitter** now here: [corpsey_art](#)

I post a one hour countdown on all my social medias for a new chapter update if you're interested in such a thing :)

-

DUDES. We have new Hush Now art!! They're all amazing. Go and give them all so much love<3

(And if I ever miss linking your art- pls let me know!! I try to make sure I keep track of everything but I am but human)

[Jester by finn_rat](#) art

[Red Chaos: Hero or Villain? by iris_apatura](#) art

[FANART MASTERPOST](#)

Chapter 38

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Techno glances up as Theseus steps out from the bathroom, words dying on his tongue with a twist in his chest as the other looks sharply up, meeting his gaze with brown eyes, Wilbur's coat brushing at the bend of his knees.

The shade of the hair is nearly perfect, curls brushing down messily, shorter than Wilbur's but-

For a moment he's taken back in time, sixteen-years-old and watching his brother spread his arms dramatically with a turn in the mirror, fingers brushing over the pattern of scales on the sides of the mask, eyes gleaming.

"You look like an Enforcer," Techno had told him with a grunt, glancing up from the book he'd been reading, something new Phil had picked up for him.

Wilbur had pulled his gun from the holster, twirling it around, long fingers wrapping around the mouth of it and handle tipped against his mouth with a curving smile.

"That's the point."

Theseus is skinnier, gangly, had always been since Techno first ran into Dream's loyal dog, but the two weeks with Warden had left a hollowness to his cheeks with shadows ghosting dark under his eyes, something that only further accentuated the likeness to Wilbur, ironically enough.

Wilbur had always been thin and lanky, shooting up like a string bean with a clumsy awkwardness to him when Techno first met him and it had made his instincts twitchy to protect him.

Techno's tail flicks behind him, eyes drifting down to the fist that gets shoved out towards him, twisting around to reveal the golden ring with a protective curl of fingers.

"It doesn't work over the glove and it won't fit under it," Theseus tells him, shoulders set and chin raised in challenge.

Techno wonders if he's aware of the way his fingers twitches, instincts clearly telling him to keep it, tail flicking back and forth with a curl of the tufty blonde end, agitation clear even as his eyes doesn't veer away.

Wilbur would get the same look in his eyes when he was being stubborn.

Techno is stepping forward, palms settling over Theseus fingers, closing his fist with a squeeze and a low warning *chuff* as the other jerks, shoulders drawing tense but not moving to escape his grip.

“Keep it,” Techno rumbles. “I’ll find you a chain and you can wear it around your neck.”

It’s not Wilbur who stares back at him but his heart aches when Theseus pauses, studying him with clever but wary eyes.

“Won’t that be annoying if we get into a fight?” He demands, tugging at his hand.

Techno’s mouth curls, releasing the other and stepping back with a turn and swish of his cloak. “You just gotta be good enough to make sure they can’t take it.”

“*Git gud* he tells me,” Theseus grumps as he falls easily at his side, as if he belongs there. “There are more sensible options for jewelry you know?”

“Like a bracelet?” Techno drawls with mocking irony.

“Oh you can fuck right off-“

-

Eret observes quietly as their fellow Hero steps into the room, dressed in Siren’s gear, gun tucked comfortably into the holster on his thigh.

For the first time, he doesn’t stand out like a sore thumb as Red Chaos amidst Villains, heavy boots threading across the wooden floor instead of sneakers, shoulders set and coat moving with his steps, his new pink arm hidden and tail tucked out of sight.

They turn their head, glancing at Philza as the man rises from his seat.

Eret doubts that Philza, for all his age and wisdom, had expected the picture Red Chaos’ made in Siren’s outfit.

“Well, this is a surprise.” Phil’s voice is smooth but his wings betray his surprise even as his hands spreads to distract from it.

Once down in the dark streets of the Pit no-one would be looking close enough to pay attention to the ill-fit shoulders and sleeves brushing just a bit too long over gloved hands – the other Hero had even gone out of his way to get the wispy stray curls of Wilbur’s fringe beneath the maroon beanie.

It’s strangely endearing.

Eret had always admired Red’s tenaciousness, the motivation to get up over and over again, no matter what life threw at him.

He’d been playing a dangerous game from the day he was announced on the television, Dream’s sidekick, not an officially ranked Hero but quickly proving himself worthy of it with cleverness and danger, red streaking around his body in an echo of Dream’s neon green.

A likeness that had been striking for a reason, it turned out.

“What, the fact that I clean up nicely?” Red’s voice filters with a higher hollowed echo through Siren’s mask, tone sharp and biting as he steps forward, afraid but doing his best not to hide it with index and thumb framing his jaw with a cocky ease amidst his enemies. “I even shaved.”

“Not that it can be seen behind the mask,” Techno huffs, staying close beside Red instead of moving to Philza’s side Eret observes with interest, the Villain’s tail visible instead of tucked away, swaying almost idly behind him with a small flick of the pink tuft at the very end when Red folds his arms.

He’d been mocked by the world for the role he took pride in, then discarded for that very same role by the man he’d sworn his loyalty to.

Beaten down, his powers robbed from him, caught and tortured, humiliated with his weakness broadcasted to his enemies.

“He looks like an idiot,” Fundy grumbles under his breath, just low enough for Eret to catch it, seated on the arm of the chair beside them. “Are you sure this is a good idea? I mean- he knows you as a Hero, doesn’t he? Won’t he get suspicious?”

Eret turns their palms up, staring down at their hands, covered by gloves.

Hands capable of death with a single touch.

“Niki is my sister,” they say eventually.

“And you’d do everything for her, I get that.” Fundy leans surreptitiously closer, fingers clenching in the leather to keep from sliding. “But things are *bad* in the Pit and the last thing we want is to give Schlatt an excuse to enter it.” A twitch of his tail, just visible at the end of the poncho. “I don’t really get what the plan is,” Fundy admits quietly, eyes on Red Chaos.

Fundy would never be a part of the Syndicate, no matter how he ached for it beneath the vitriol.

He’d burnt that bridge long ago.

Just a Vigilante, used for his connections, a denial about it he clung desperately to.

“Philza isn’t one to play foolish games,” Eret settles on diplomatically.

“No, but he’d see the world burn if it meant Wilbur safe.” Bitter envy crawls raw into his voice.

Eret doesn’t comment on it – they’d seen the aftermath of Fundy’s decisions and while he’d managed to crawl back into being useful, he’d never be what he could have been.

His cowardice and disloyalty had paid its price.

“... He really looks just like him,” Fundy says quietly.

A Hero dressed as a Villain.

“Blade filled me in- the bare-fucking-bones of it but I’ve got the gist of what you want from me.” A tilt of his head. “Chaos is kinda my brand so- leave shit to me and I’ll handle it.”

Philza’s hand dips into his pocket, pulling out an earpiece. “Yours slot into the side of Siren’s mask,” Phil throws one to red who snatches it up easily, flicking it between gloved fingers with an easy once over and a nod. “We’ll keep contact to a minimum but if anything goes wrong-“

“I’ve got it,” Red interrupts, twisting the square piece of the mask over his ear and sliding it in with a deft *click*. “Not my first rodeo.”

“You’ve never worked with us before,” Techno rumbles.

“No, but I’ve been on the other side.” Red’s eyes gleam and the pull of his skin tells of the grin beneath his mask. “Read all the reports.”

Careful, Eret thinks, observing the tension of the man’s shoulders and tremble of fingers hidden with a curling tightening of them that pulls at the leather of his gloves. *You’re playing a dangerous game.*

The Angel’s eyes sharpens, wings curling and-

They stand smoothly, feeling the way Techno’s eyes tracks them with every step towards Red Chaos who flicks his gaze up, meeting their eyes without recognition, wariness clear.

Eret is born with roses that bloom in the palm of their hands with the use of their powers, spilling out like ink that carves deeper into their palms with every taken life, sins permanently written into their skin.

On their left palm faint lines patters out in a light white scar, their life as Royal, careful to paralyze but never kill.

On their right palm the grooves run deep and ragged, bone deep with ink that clings dark to the ridges, never quite fading with Eris.

“Sounds like it’s an opportunity for all of us then,” Eret says smoothly, stretching their hand forward. “I’m looking forward to working with you.”

Most won’t touch them, knowing their power, both as a Hero and Villain.

Red hesitates, head tilting just an inch, giving them a deeply scrutinizing look before reaching forward, hand clasping theirs with a squeeze.

“Likewise.”

There’s a reason Eret has always liked Red.

“Weak.”

Tubbo slams his fists against the wall, chest heaving as he spins around, grabbing for the nearest vase and throwing it across the room.

“You’ll always be weak.”

His knees hits the floor and vines span and crawl in a web from his fingers, couch lurched up with a loud *crash* as it vaulted into the television, tearing down the bookshelf beside it as it topples over, narrowly missing the window.

“You’ll never be anything compared to Red Chaos.” Schlatt’s fancy shoes steps over his legs and Tubbo jerks them back, curling on himself with bruises on his skin as the Number Two Hero presses down on the light switch, ignoring his desperate protest and closing the door shut before he could reach it. *“I don’t know why I bother.”*

His hands presses over his ears, fingers brushing over his horns before tangling in his hair as he tucks them tight, chest heaving as he stares out over the destruction around him, mouth twisting with grief and self-loathing.

-

Quackity swears, straining desperately, broken wing twining with pain as Enforcers grabs at his arms, pinning him tightly in place, jaw pried open and a cloth gag slipped between his teeth, knotted tight with a catch of his strands that makes him wince.

A palm finds the back of his neck with painful forced bow of his head, breath straining around the cloth he bites down furiously at as he glares at the floor.

Sweat drips from his brow from the heat coiling up his bare back, the door to his cell pulled open with a heavy rattle and steps quiet against the obsidian flooring.

“You don’t think you’re exaggerating just a bit?” A voice, heavily accented and drowsy makes him jerk but he’s pushed further down, the muscles in his neck and shoulders aching in the strain to prevent himself from going face down on the floor. “The obsidian has already drained his powers away at this point.”

“Schlatt’s orders, sir,” the Enforcer keeping his head down responds, grip painfully tight. “He said-“

“Don’t care,” the accented voice interrupts with a yawn. “He’s not exactly here right now, is he? And I want to talk with the prisoner on my own.”

“Sir-“

“Now.”

The hands releases him suddenly and Quackity jerks, blinking furiously with a flaring of his nose.

“We’ll have to report this to Schlatt, sir.”

“Yeah, yeah.” Quackity’s head jerks up, locking onto 404 rubbing tiredly at the back of his neck, goggles over his eyes with dark visors and a white mask over his mouth and nose – circular holes patterned through it for his sleep powder to span out with a breath.

Dark cargo pants, a plain turtleneck shirt and one of the standard protection vests from the academy strapped over his shoulders but blue instead of black. There’s a red stripe on his shoulder with 404 marked clearly in white and sensible dark grey boots that moves quiet as he pushes away from where he’d been leaning half-slumped against the doorway.

There’s still one Enforcer linger and 404 turns his head, eyebrow raising up. “Go on then.”

They salute, heels clacking together, pulling the door shut behind him and locking it tight with a rattle of metal.

“I’m not really supposed to be here,” 404 breathes, taking a step forward as Quackity draws back, staring up at the Number Ten Hero. “And we don’t have a lot of time, places to be and all that.” He waves a hand. “I’m kinda- avoiding some people at the moment so it would be a bit awkward if I was still here when they get the news.”

404 crouches down, hand raising to trail against the cloth of the gag in his mouth, ignoring his flinch and finding the knot with a tug as he leans closer, mouth angling close to Quackity’s ear.

“I need access to your slimes,” the Hero breathes, arms wrapping around his head, fingers fiddling with the knot, carefully tugging caught hair in it away from it and smoothing it down.

The gag is loosened just enough for Quackity to work it out of his mouth, licking his lip.

“And why,” he demands with a rasped hiss, “would I give that to *you*?”

“Oh, I forgot, I don’t think we’ve had the pleasure of meeting officially yet.” 404 draws back, palm pressing his goggles up, revealing brown eyes, mask unlatched to reveal a pretty face. “I’m George.” The accent is even heavier without the voice changer, distinct in a way that’s hard not to notice. “I think Sapnap might have mentioned me.”

Quackity gapes at him. “You’re *Gogy*?”

George’s face pinches but the twist of his lips is fond. “Yeah, that would be me.”

-

Karl curls his hands tight in his lap, his powers tugging at him with a slow blink, blood trailing wet from his eye down his face.

His breath shudders, cold clinging heavy to his skin, a bowl of mashed potatoes left abandoned on the table in front of him beside a bottle of cola.

“Do you think I’m doing the right thing?” he asks the small Slimecicle as it hoists itself up on his knee, struggling briefly before making itself comfortable. “Red- he’s too young but- he’s a game changer, you know?” He laughs weakly, hunching forward with a breath that strains against his ribs. “I think- I think I can trust him.”

“You want Jester back.” Slimecicle claps its tiny hands together. “If he can help, isn’t that a good thing?”

Karl sucks a breath, eyes closing shut with teeth that bites into his lip to catch the tremble.

“Maybe- I don’t-“ He exhales heavily. “I can’t leave Quackity with Schlatt.” He curls further on himself, arms tight over his chest. “Sapnap- Sapnap he’s a Hero and things are going on and-“

A small hand presses against the side of his neck, trembles wrecking through him.

“It feels like I’m losing both of them,” he confesses, tears spilling wet down his cheeks, mixing with the blood as he laughs. “I don’t- I feel like I’m losing *myself* because I can barely- I can barely *think* but I can’t just *stop*.”

“Please be okay,” he prays weakly, forehead pressing down against his clasped fingers, trembling as a small arms span against the side of his neck in a hug. “Please let them both be okay.”

-

Sapnap stares at Schlatt who grins back, cigar tapped without looking away from him, ash trailing to the ground.

-

“We shouldn’t be doing this,” Ranboo squawks, helplessly following along with the clenching of fingers around his wrist, hunched down with a flare of panic running through him. “We promised-“

“I don’t care,” Tubbo interrupts, coming to an abrupt halt, a wild look in his eyes that he fixates on him. “Schlatt is up to something and I can’t- I can’t stay on the sidelines anymore, ‘Boo.”

“You were fine with it yesterday,” Ranboo fumbles out, twisting his wrist to curl his fingers around Tubbo’s wrist in return, feeling the racing pulse against his skin and forcing himself to keep the eye contact. “I don’t understand what changed.”

Tubbo falters, head lowering with a brush of his fringe over his eyes, lip twisting and fingers clenching around the mask clasped tight in his hand.

“Everyone is getting ready to move,” he says finally. “This is- I think this is bigger than anything we first expected.” A hard breath. “No. I *know* it is. Red- *he cut his arm off* and if that isn’t evidence enough then I don’t know what it is.” The hard grip on Ranboo’s wrist

loosens, squeezing in apology. “If I can help- they’re entering the Pit and they’re going to need a distraction until whatever they have planned with Red Chaos.”

Ranboo’s eyes widens. “You’re not-“

“If Schlatt is looking for me,” Tubbo interrupts, stubborn desperation in the pull of his skin, “then he won’t have time to focus on Jest- on Quackity.”

Ranboo hesitates, guilt curling thick in his gut because he’d *promised* Eret and Techno that he wouldn’t do anything.

But-

“Niki is in Pandora as well,” Ranboo says quietly.

Niki who had taken him in along with Eret, giving him a home, a *family*, when he had had nothing but scrambled memories and a reliance on Techno who had found him.

“She is,” Tubbo glances cautiously up at him. “They saved us.”

Ranboo’s mouth feels dry and he swallows thickly.

“Don’t you think we owe the same in return?” Tubbo presses. “Red, he had that paper from Schlatt’s tower, I know that bastard is still looking for me if he had that laying around. I’m a loose end that he can afford to let go public. He still wants me.”

Vines twines up his arm, stretching a webbed path between Tubbo’s fingers, small flowers blossoming in their path with bright petals against his suit, the tips of his fingers creasing down the fabric.

“Please.”

Tubbo stands, shoulders drawn, hand wrapped around his wrist, avoiding his gaze and awaiting judgement.

“Through sickness and health.”

Tubbo jerks, gaze shooting up.

“We didn’t actually do the vows-“

“In joy and sorrow,” Ranboo interrupts, leaning closer.

“We married for the tax benefits-“

“For better,” Ranboo presses, meeting his gaze steadily, “and for *worse*.”

“As long as we both shall live,” Tubbo finishes with a choked breath. *“Thank you.”*

-

“Nemesis!” Rose croons, skirt flaring as she kneels down, Niki’s blood staining her knees, a hand tangling in her hair and jerking her head up. “Don’t you go falling asleep on me when we’re just starting to get to know each other!”

Niki lets her body remain loose, allowing her head to be tugged back and forth until Rose abruptly lets go, her cheek splashing into the warm blood beneath her.

“Fine.” Rose puffs her cheeks out. “You’re far more boring than I thought you’d be.”

Fingers tug at her hair, carding through the knotted strands, sorting them out almost absently as Niki focuses on keeping her breathing deep and even.

Time passes but Rose shows no sign of wanting to leave, tugging at the drying pieces of blood and wiping them off on her skirt, muttering quietly to herself.

“Schlatt- he said you and Eris are siblings,” Rose says quietly, separating Niki’s hair into three sections. “I don’t really know of that’s true or not but-“

No one is supposed to know that.

There’s blood coagulating stickily on her cheek and ice crawling down her spine as Rose’s fingers starts on the first braid.

“They did something to me, you know?” Rose hunches closer and Niki carefully pries one eye open just enough to catch sight of her face, young with haunted eyes, the thin beautiful wings on her back flecked with spots of red. “I’m not- I’m not stupid. I know something is wrong but I don’t- I don’t know how to fix it.”

Her brown hair, normally impeccably styled, hangs limp over her shoulder,

The braid is finished, a small pink elastic band tying it off, fingers brushing the tail end with surprising care, her mouth thinning out, wings fluttering gently behind her.

Oh little fairy... what did Eret do to you?

-

Sam circles a thumb around the rim of the coffee mug, staring past it, down at the thick white fur of Fran deep asleep in the middle of the floor, sprawled out with her back towards him, faithfully keeping guard of the door to the café.

It’s closed, he has no plans to open it for the next week, and yet-

“I thought I’d find you here,” Ponk yawns, stumbling in behind him with a tired stretch of his arms above him.

Sam places the mug down on the counter, turning the ear instinctively to the right.

As on cue Ponk’s hand sneaks past him, fingers curling into it and bringing it up.

“It’s still hot-“ Ponk chugs it straight down, throat bobbing with every swallow and Sam’s mouth tips with a helpless sort of warmth, for just a moment allowing himself to bask in the normalcy of morning as Ponk places the mug down, wiping his arm with the corner of the sweater Sam recognises as his own.

The other man sways tiredly closer, almost cautiously pressing against him, the first morning light just beginning to stretch between the tall buildings outside.

“Still nothing from them?” Ponk asks after a long moment, hand reaching to catch at the hem of Sam’s shirt, fingers curling gently.

Sam’s mouth twists, drawing a hard breath.

“Nothing,” he admits roughly.

Tommy had disappeared without a trace, his apartment left abandoned, and with Quackity’s capture-

There’s a deep vicious darkness coiling inside of him, Warden’s uncompromising wrath a thing he can taste on his tongue with the gunpowder smoke curling in the depth of his throat.

He breathes it out, Fran jerking from her sleep with a twisting of her head, bright yellow eyes finding his as Ponk stills beside him.

“Red Chaos is working with the Syndicate now.”

Ponk still, drawing back from him, shoulders pulling tight as Sam glances at him.

“What’s wron-“

“Don’t you think you’ve done enough?” Ponk interrupts, voice tight but wavering. “Two weeks, Sammy. You tortured Red Chaos for *two weeks* and you can’t- don’t you think it’s about time you let it *go*?”

Ponk looks up at him.

“The man clearly knows nothing and he might not even be involved in Quackity’s disappearance at all! You might be-“

“He was the last one who saw him,” Sam interrupts sharply. “He was the last one who saw Quackity and he won’t tell me *anything*.”

“Maybe you’re going about it the wrong way?” Ponk suggest with hope creeping into his voice. “I don’t really know the guy but-“

“Ponk.”

The other inhales sharply.

“I’m just saying that there might be another way of doing this!” Ponk pushes, right arm drawing over his chest and curling into the too big sweater. “You don’t know definitively that Red Chaos knows anything, or is even involved! He was kicked out of the Hero tower, right? He might just be this dude struggling and you’re-“

“*Ponk.*”

The gunpowder smoke wafts thick from his mouth, a grey cloud of danger that makes Ponk take a jerky step back, staring at him with large brown eyes.

Sam forces himself to draw a deep breath, smothering it down.

“I didn’t mean-“

“Look at yourself!” Ponk bursts out. “This isn’t you, Sam! The Sam I know would never hurt someone just for the heck of it! There’s plenty of other ways you could have gone about getting information from him but instead you dragged me into it! Made me an accomplice to- to *torture*.” Ponk’s arms curls tighter around himself, the silence stretching thick between them. “I swore an oath, and it might not mean much to you, but it meant something to *me*.” Ponk’s eyes burns into his. “And you took that away from me.”

They stare at each other, brown finally lowering down from gold.

“I can tell you’re not listening to me.” Ponk takes another step back, away from him. “You know, I really thought you were different,” he laughs, Sam’s fingers twitching at the joyless tired sound and Ponk’s hand clamps down on the stump that remains of his left arm. “*You* were supposed to be *different*.”

Sam hands curls tight, knuckles straining white against the stretch of his skin.

“I’m getting Quackity home,” Sam says roughly. “And I’m not letting anyone stand in my way.”

Ponk stares at him and the distance between them is only a few feet, and yet it feels as wide and gaping as a ravine.

When they had been young, just children, growing up together in the orphanage, they used to play *the floor is lava* together.

Ponk complaints had been loud as he struggled to keep up, calling his name when he’d get stuck until Sam realised and climbed back to help him to a pout that always made him grin sheepishly.

“*I wouldn’t leave you behind,*” Sam had promised him. “*You just have to keep calling my name until I hear you because I have a bit of a one-track mind, okay?*”

When they meet years later it’s with eyes staring wide at him with disbelief but the trust slots so easily between them, leather bitten down on and an arm left behind in a pool of blood, Sam making sure that the Warden was seen at the sight, leaving little doubt for the survival of the Healer.

“Then, let me remove myself, before you decide that *I’m* the one standing in your way,” Ponk’s voice wavers, thick with unspoken words.

“You have a contract with the Syndicate,” Sam says coldly.

“The Syndicate,” Ponk turns his back and it feels short, *final*. “Not with *the Warden*.”

-

“Glass?” Red lifts the small vial up, studying it with a little swirl of the blood inside.

“There’s eight of them.” Phil holds the belt he’d adjusted for the task. “Here- you can slide them in here, see?”

Red takes it with eyes that flicks cautiously to his for just a moment before focusing down, fingers running down and finding the slots easily, counting them out with his thumb and a low hum.

It’s eerie, how much he looks like Wilbur, down to the curls of his hair messily brushed out over his eyes, the contacts hiding the once blue colour.

There’s a cautiousness in his body language that reminds Phil achingly of Wilbur when he’d been younger, wary and disillusioned of the world he’d grown up in, distrusting of him but desperate to trust in the same breath.

Techno glances back at him, as if reading his mind, and there’s an understanding there between them.

Wilbur is coming home, no matter what.

There’s a rustle as Red loops the belt in place, adjusting it before looking up expectantly.

There’s a body language of a soldier written into his every move.

A want to follow, a want to be needed, lost with the one who had conducted his moves.

Phil isn’t a fool, he knows that Red can’t be much older than Techno, and there’s a tragedy in that, for someone to be so young and readily ready to throw everything away when he’d barely started to live.

It’s admirable as well, a stubbornness that’s far too familiar in the gleam of his sons’ eyes.

“We got everything we need?” Red, a near perfect replica of Wilbur, his son, the scent of sandalwood and nicotine still clinging to the coat, and Phil’s instincts croon at the loss of his son at his side.

“Yeah,” Techno grunts, crown proud on his head and his piglin features more distinct than they had been only hours before. “We’re just waiting for you now.”

Red whips around but his excitement gets the better of him, a barely caught bounce in his step as he trots over, falling easily at Techno's side as they move towards the door.

His son pauses in the opening, their eyes meeting for a moment as Red disappears out it.

They don't say goodbye, life is too short for them.

"See you on the flip side," Techno says instead, in an echo of Wilbur.

It startles a laugh out of him and he sees the gleam of satisfaction before Techno turns, lengthening his steps with a call to the Hero in front of him to *slow down*.

Phil folds his wings around him instead of stretching them out as his heart aches for, to take to the sky and find Wilbur, to challenge the very world if needed.

He knows it's not so easy and his claim on Wilbur pulses steadily, letting him know that his oldest is yet alive.

Hurt, but alive.

He breathes in, sitting down heavily, the mark on his back glowing warm.

"Watch over our sons for me," he prays to his love, his Goddess of Death with a press of his hand against the pendant resting over his heart. "They're too young to know your embrace yet."

-

"I don't know how he moves in this," Tommy grumbles, tail end flicking against his side where it rests curled around his midriff and tugging at the coat. "You're all impractical fuckers."

"Says the person running around in a hoodie in minus ten degrees."

"You're wearing a heavy cloak and a *crown*, you have no room to talk." Tommy gives up with a roll of his shoulders and a sigh "I've *seen* you in the summer heat."

"Piglins are netherborn mobs," Techno tells him with a glance of red eyes. "The heat is where we *belong*."

Tommy quiets at that, fingers brushing over the lapels of Siren's coat.

"I thought it was rumours," he says after a long moment.

"What?"

"That he- that Siren doesn't wear armour." The white button-up is soft against his skin.

"Seems a bit, you know, *impractical*."

“He always hated them,” Techno says, voice hard to read, mouth curling down at the corner.
“Claimed he had no need for them.”

“That's dumb,” Tommy mutters, fingers curling over the feather and ring resting against his skin beneath the shirt.

Techno huffs a quiet sound. “Looks like we’re finally in agreement about something.

Chapter End Notes

oooh man, ngl, this chapter was a bit tricky to get right with all the POVs but I hope I did them justice because we're setting things up before Tommy ventures into the Pit in the next chapter and i am so ready to get to it because it's been a long time coming

it's past midnight, i've spent far too many hours writing, but tomorrow i'm kidnapping my beloved dewdrop and i wanted to have this done and posted before then<3

things are starting to roll and it's only going out from here so strap in tight

hope you're having a good one, wherever you are out there<3

-

If you're interested there's a [Hush Now Discord](#) that tends to go *brrrrr* with the theories in designated channels and also have a lot of fun chatter and chill people on top of scoops of chaos with my lovely mods<3

You can find me on **tumblr** here: [corpse-art](#)
And I'm also on **twitter** now here: [corpsey_art](#)

I post a one hour countdown on all my social medias for a new chapter update if you're interested in such a thing :)

-

DUDES. We have new Hush Now art!! They're all amazing. Go and give them all so much love<3

(And if I ever miss linking your art- pls let me know!! I try to make sure I keep track of everything but I am but human)

[CAW CAW by maze_is_dot](#) art

[The Cast of Hush Now by finn_rat](#) art

[Brown Hair by SquirrelViolent](#) art

[Playing Pretend by PlantChecker](#) art

[In The Blood God's Domain by itsliliesval](#) art

[Lookalike by tododokii](#) art

[Blood God by nightgaming0](#) art

[Hush Now spread by WinteryyH](#) art

[FANART MASTERPOST](#)

Chapter 39

Chapter Notes

Someone requested an overview of the known secret identities so I'll fill this out properly at a later date and then post with each chapter:

Tommy - Red Chaos

Heroes:

Dream - Dream

404 - George

Valorant - Sapnap

Royal - Eret

Rose - Hannah

Schlatt - Schlatt (formerly Judge)

Villains:

Angel of Death - Phil

Blood God - Techno

Siren - Wilbur

Warden - Sam

Lethe - Ranboo

Judge - Tubbo

Jester - Quackity

Nemesis - Niki

Eris - Eret

Vigilantes:

Faux Pas - Fundy

Chronos - Karl

Kitten - TinaKitten

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

What Tommy knows about the Pit can easily be summed up into caught rumours.

The one fighting ring he'd entered with Dream that hadn't been *it* really as much as it was associated with it, far less secure with high bid money on the rough but sloppy fighters in the ring.

"Just hold onto me," Techno tells him with a low grunt after hauling him up and back at his side with a yank of his collar after he'd tripped for the fifth time.

"I can't help I can't see shit," Tommy grumbles but paws out blindly to grasp at the heavy red cloak, tangling his fingers in it. "Where are we going anyway?" he asks, squinting into the stretch of darkness.

"There's three ways to enter the Pit," Eris says, falling in on his right, taller with heavy boots on their feet. "The main entrance is located near the Tree of L'Manberg but it hasn't been used in years."

"Because of the Hero Tower?"

They're deep underground, heading only *deeper*, and he tries to keep his steps confidently matched with Techno's despite the fact that he can make out *nothing*, the darkness oppressive around them, the air thin and sound hollow in the echo of their voices.

The others don't seem to struggle at all and Tommy wonders if it's because they're true hybrids unlike the amalgamation that he is.

"It was blocked off because of it, yes," Eris tells him and fuck it, Tommy isn't about to look the freely offered information in the mouth even if it feels strange to be given it so easily.

"There is one other way to do it, and Faux Pas is one of few who is able to operate it."

"How so?"

"Here's a revolutionary concept for you- how about it's *none of your business*," Faux responds with bite, tension clear in his voice where he's walking ahead of them.

"The Pit is old magic," Eris changes subject smoothly before Tommy can muster something in return. "It is said that the demon who made it created it in memory of the person they loved, sealing their body away to prevent it from being something to be studied and torn apart, or worse, sold to high bidders. And thus, the Pit was born."

Tommy's fingers twitches at the mention of a demon, head lowering with a clenching of his jaw.

"If there's any truth to it, I cannot say. There's been no mention of a demon in modern times and the Pit largely rules itself."

Bad's betrayal is a vivid thing in his heart, constricting heavily around it and prickling sharp with thorns and-

He's *old*, the idea that he might be connected to the Pit- Tommy can't rule it out. Bad had already made it clear, more than once, that there was certain information he wouldn't share, secrets he wouldn't part with even when asked.

Tommy had first met him when he was nine and Bad had kept much from him, distracting with tales and candies the few times they had been on their own.

Bad was one of the ancients, those of old walking the world of today, and the thought of seeing him again, of possibly stepping into his *territory*-

“Torn apart?” he forces out to distract from it.

Tommy can’t see anything in the dark but Eris’ shoulder brushes against his. “You’ll understand when you see him.”

“Because that’s not ominous at all,” Tommy snorts only to trip, yanking hard on Techno’s cloak to catch his footing with a stumble.

He can’t see in the dark but those red eyes shifts towards him with a dull unimpressed glow that stands out starkly.

“... You’ll keep your balance easier if you let your tail out.”

“And trip over that instead?”

“Think of it as good practice.

Tommy lets out a noncommittal grunt but unwinds his tail with a flick where it reaches beneath the hem of the coat, long and whiplike with the small tuft at the end of it.

“You said there were two other entrances?”

“We’re taking the lesser known one,” Eris informs him. “Only the Syndicate knows about it and only a handful know how to work it.”

“I see.” Curiosity blooms in his chest, about the other entrance, but he doubts he’d get an answer and a part of him doesn’t really want to know.

Heroes don’t belong in the Pit, after all.

-

Techno comes to a halt and Tommy opens his mouth but-

Before he can make a sound a palm flattens over his eyes, light brightening out sudden and vicious behind it with a harsh clamping of his eyes and a low startled *chirp* of surprise coughed out as his fingers curls over the other’s, heart ramping up in speed instinctively.

“*Faux*, ” Techno’s voice is exasperated.

“I forgot he was there!” Faux calls back innocently as Tommy slowly pries one eye open, squinting at the pink palm, eyes stinging as Techno spread his fingers, giving him time to adjust from the abrupt change from darkness.

After a minute he tugs at it and Techno obligingly slides it off.

“Thanks,” Tommy squeezes out, rubbing at his eyes with a grimace. “Bitch,” he tacks on belatedly with a sour glance at Faux.

“Don’t pay him any attention, he’s a petty coward.” Techno steps forward, past him, and Tommy hesitates before following, eyes drifting curiously around him, taking a full step around to stare into the cave that he knew he’d never be able to make his way back through on his own.

They hadn’t needed to cover his eyes for a reason, a clever way to hide the true path with the winding hallways in the darkness.

“It doesn’t sound like you like him much,” Tommy says as he turns around, not bothering to lower his voice.

“I don’t.” Techno’s voice is flat. “But he’s useful enough when given *incentive* to be.”

Tommy snorts at that.

The dark hallway opens into a small underground cave, bright fluorescent lights stretching down the damp ceiling, and Faux is at a large machine, a small comm-like controller connected to it where he’s crouching on the other side of a train track.

The machine is unlike anything Tommy has ever seen, bulky and complex looking with levers and shining lamps webbed with metal over them, a glittering sheen of red dust clinging to parts of it.

“I’d heard rumours of an underground train station but I didn’t know it actually existed,” Tommy breathes out, stepping to lean forward and peer down the opposite dark tunnels, water dripping slow and wet onto the tracks.

There’s a musky sort of smell to the whole place, the wood rotting in places, patches and repairs easy to be seen.

“Very few do.” Eris drops down, letting one leg dangle over the tracks, the other drawn up for their elbow to rest loosely on, clearly settling in for a long wait. “Faux is one of the three who can operate it.”

“Who is the other two?”

“The Angel,” Eris head cranes towards him, watching him through the dark shades of their sunglasses, “and Warden.”

Tommy twitches.

“Right,” he musters out. “Love that for them.”

“Oh *sure* tell the *Hero* all about it!” Faux Pas doesn’t look up from where he’s working but his shoulders are tense and his voice spiteful. “Why don’t you tell him all our powers and weaknesses while you’re at it? Or what about the *real reason* Schlatt is so obsessed with Sire-“

“*That’s enough.*” Techno’s voice rings out sharp and coiling, one hand wrapped around the handle of his axe as Faux stiffens, frozen in place with thumb hovering above a button with a

tremble and shiver.

The fox mask lowers down. "My apologies," Faux Pas says meekly after a long stretch of silence.

"What did he mean with the *real* reason?" Tommy narrows his eyes as Blade slowly shifts his attention to him, heart pounding inside his chest. "If you know something--"

"What does it matter to you?" Techno challenges, golden crown sharp and jutting on his head.

Because it's Wilbur, Tommy thinks but does not say, jaw clenching tight.

"I'm here to help--"

"You're here because of *Dream*," Techno cuts him off. "You've made that *very* clear."

"I'm here because it's the right fucking thing to do!" Tommy snaps back, taking a step towards him. "I protected Siren that night and if that doesn't prove I don't want the bastard dead then what the *fuck* do you want from me!?"

Techno's mouth twists, the gold circling his tusks a distracting gleam.

"I'm not having this argument with you again," the man says heavily.

"I lost fucking everything that night!" Tommy snaps, finger curling tight at his side. "*I'm* the one who got fucking tortured, *I'm* the one here risking my ass with barely any fucking information and yet *I'm* the one getting distrusted the most? Eris is the only one giving me fucking *something* to work with--"

"This isn't really the time--"

"Fuck off!" Tommy snarls at Faux Pas who jerks, shrinking back.

"We're taking you right into the Pit," Techno says, arms folding across his chest, muscles straining against the white of his shirt. "That's giving you something."

"*Because you need me there,*" Tommy stresses in irritation and frustration alike. "I'm not asking for fucking much but I'm stuck in the middle of this so give me fucking *something* to work with so I don't get- I don't know- taken by *complete*-fucking-surprise!"

They stare at each other, Tommy's chest heaving, Techno's eyes unreadable.

"Faux Pas was out of line," Techno says after a long moment and the Vigilante ducks his head at the corner of Tommy's eyes, shrinking deeper on himself, Eris watching them both silently with the grin on their mask stark and sharp. "Siren's identity connects him to the building stones of L'Manberg and that's the only thing I'll tell you on that topic because anything else jeopardizes his identity."

Tommy frowns. "Yeah, okay, I can accept that."

“We’re going into the Pit for two reasons,” the Villain continues, shifting to stare down the long winding tunnel to the right. “We’re meeting with a contact of Angel and once done we’re using you to drag out the Enforcers and potential Heroes in the Pit. If they’re daring enough to be down there it’s a good chance they know something.”

Tommy’s shoulders ease. “Information gathering.”

Techno inclines his head. “And pest control,” he grunts. “Schlatt isn’t so foolish to take on the Pit without reason and people are going to wonder what’s going on once there’s rumours about Siren free in the Pit using Nemesis’ powers starts circling out.”

Tommy’s eyes widen. “He’ll have to give people something to make sure they know they’re still in his custody.”

The Villain’s mouth curls with a hint of approval. “You catch on quick.”

There’s a grunt, a heavy grinding sound of metal against stone, Faux Pas turning one of the circular valves with a rumble that shakes the floor, small loose pebbles shaking as the ground on the tracks beneath Eris dangling leg split and folded down, slowly opening up as the Villain pulled their dangling leg up.

A single cart train rises from it, steam hissing out, settling in place slowly, the tracks slotting perfectly in place with those already there.

It’s nothing impressive, different from the old subway carts he’d seen in some history books and nothing like the smooth shining ones that travels above ground in L’Manberg.

The blue paint is peeling on the sides of it and inside of the cart is painted yellow with metal poles shining in contrast.

Tommy’s stomach twists at the sight of old enchantments on the sides of it.

“There!” Faux says with satisfaction as the door creaks before violently slamming open.

Tommy stares at it for a long moment before taking a slow step backwards-

Techno’s hand splays between his shoulder blades and Tommy’s boots slides forward several inches with the push.

“Are we sure this is safe?” Tommy mutters as he grudgingly trips into movement, stepping on after Eris who is already turning with a motion of their arm to move their cloak aside before sitting down neatly, one leg thrown over the other.

Tommy finds himself seated across them, Techno sinking down at his side as he paws down-

“All ready?” Faux Pas calls from the front.

“There’s no seatbelt,” Eris says, the tone of their voice amused as Tommy’s head snaps towards them.

“What do you mean there’s no-“ There’s a jerk, a jarring *screech* that makes him flinch, hands slapping over his ears as he shrinks back against Techno who tenses but doesn’t push him away, a grimace tugging at the Villain’s own mouth as the train slowly starts to move forward.

Tommy, half-crammed against Techno’s side, stares wide-eyed out the window as the cart keeps climbing and climbing in speed, making no motion of slowing down.

Eris watches him calmly, looking unruffled.

“Hold on!” Faux Pas calls back and

“Can’t you just press the breaks?” Tommy bites out tensely, rocking with the motion of the cart, one foot climbing under his seat, the other pressing down in a vain attempt to steady himself.

Faux Pas’ fox mask peers back at him, poncho whipping in the wind from the broken front window.

“There are no breaks.”

The cart lurches as it careens violently down a turn and Tommy’s hand shoots out, clawing down on Techno’s cloak.

The Villain shifts, head craning closer to him. “Scared?” Techno mocks in a low drawl that ghosts warm down his face.

“It’s called self-perseverance you *dickhead*!” The cart swoops down and Tommy’s stomach swoops, nails sinking into Techno’s bicep, a buzz off ill-ease threading through him as he presses closer.

“I’ve seen you jump from buildings without hesitation.”

“Yeah, well, that’s my choice if I go splat on the damn ground, there’s no control in a train,” Tommy bites back.

Techno’s red eyes regards him thoughtfully with a tilt of his head.

“Control issues?”

Tommy gapes at him. “I don’t wanna hear that from *you*.”

The man raises a brow.

“I don’t have control issues, and I don’t have an issue with trains, I have an issue with *this train* which, I might add, have *no breaks* apparently-“

Another lurch, Tommy’s nails sinking deeper.

“- and there’s not even a fucking snack cart to make up for the shitty service,” he squeezes out in a rush, voice rising high and sharp.

A noise, dark and rumbling, a laugh Tommy realises with a distant crawl of hot embarrassment, train cart rattling violently around them, nothing more than a moving *can of death*, walls tight and small around them.

He chokes on the noise that want to crawl out of his throat in response, turning his head deliberately to instead stare into the dark reflection of Siren mirrored back at him, starkly pale and clutching at the Blood God.

He sucks a sharp breath and when he looks away he finds himself in the reflection of Eris’ sunglasses instead.

A tremble runs through him.

“Almost there,” Faux calls back, a quiver of excitement in his voice. “Almost *home*.”

Tommy bites down on the inside of his cheek, tasting blood as a harsh rattle nicks his teeth clean through the flesh.

Unexpectedly Eris shifts, both feet planted on the ground before they lean forward, gloved hands circling around his wrist, skin burning at the touch as he stares at the Villain who squeezes his wrist.

And then his stomach swoops, locked on his reflection in dark sunglasses as the world explodes in purple light that twists and wraps around them, the train cart groaning in protest, the window on his left splitting in a spiderweb of cracks as it pushes forward as if through syrup.

A strange feeling of disconnection crawls through him, as if his very atoms were being pushed apart and pulled together at the same time, his hand twisting to grasp harder onto Eris, his heart catching on its next beat.

And then it all rushes back violently with a hard jerk forward, caught by Techno who twists his hand to press a palm against his ribs as he sucks a desperate harsh breath, coughing violently with a shivering tremble that rattles through him with a wheezed breath, heart pounding loud in his ears and nausea rising in the back of his throat.

“What was that?” Tommy rasps out.

“The Pit is sealed away,” Eris tells him in a low voice, calm and steady where they’re still holding onto him. “To enter it, you need to be marked, but there’s no one in the Pit who would willingly give it to an unknown or a Hero.” A beat. “Someone designed this train cart to travel in and out of the Pit and Faux Pas is one of the few who knows how to operate it.”

So they’d basically blunt forced their way through whatever protection circled the Pit which, fucking *lovely* really, Tommy thinks as he struggles to ground himself.

Faux Pas’ steps rattles against the metal ground of the cart as he waltzes past them.

“Who is the coward *now*?” he says airily as he passes by, door rattling open with a harsh sound before he disappears out it.

Tommy’s mouth twists violently behind his mask.

“It’s always the worst the first time,” Eris offers in a comfort that feels displaced and wrong and Tommy yanks his hand back from their grip, pushing up with a wobble, sucking a harsh breath and holding it before letting it out in a rush.

“I’m fine.”

“*Liar*,” a voice that sounds suspiciously like Wilbur’s ghosts in the back of his mind.

Why do you care? a part of Tommy hisses back, stained with too much vulnerability to feel good as he stumbles off the train cart.

-

His own mask is tucked into the pocket of the coat and his fingers brushes past it in reassurance, at the knowledge that the pills containing Dream’s blood is still within reach.

The vials of Nemesis blood sits on his back, hidden by the coat that flares dramatically as he lengthens his step to better match the lanky gait of Siren, uncurling his shoulders and tilting his head up as they step out on a cliffside that spans in a circular opening and-

The first thing he becomes aware of is the pulsing red light that spans out from the very center of the world that opens broad beneath them from a twisting tower of dark stone and metal that reaches all the way up to the middle of rounded ceiling, splaying out in something that looks almost like a palm flattening out to hold it up, the red light pulsing where it twists through it like a violent sharp web.

In the very middle of the pillar a circular glass case spans, trapped with jagged stretches of pulsing metal that frames delicately around it, almost protectively in a clawed grip.

In a contrast against the red, the circular glass case glows soft blue and Tommy’s palm flattens against the stone wall, squinting at it because-

“Is that diamonds?” he wonders, something like ill-ease threading through him as he takes in the humanoid shape carved out in the shimmering glittering material, its hand reaching out and mouth parted, as if preserved in the moment of their last words on a grassy field that had been scooped out, earth and all.

“Yes,” Eris confirms beside him, a hand pressing over their heart in respect with a lowering of their head. “It’s said that he was once alive but that a great evil challenged the demon and his life was the sacrifice paid to prevail over it.” A tip of their head. “It’s all rumours, of course.”

“We just call it the Egg.” Faux Pas drops down on the edge, letting his legs dangle. “It’s long gone now, another part of the wretched history of L’Manberg, but- see the red glow? That’s

what remains of it- used for nothing more than a light source here in the Pit. It's never coming back."

"I've never heard of it," Tommy admits slowly.

"You wouldn't have," Techno grunts, leaning against the other side of the opening, gaze distant on the streets below them. "There's a lot of things that doesn't make their way into the history books." A twist of his mouth. "Things the government prefers people know nothing about."

Tommy stares into the empty eyes of the diamond man for a long moment before forcing himself to look down.

Beneath him the buildings span in a shorter echo of the above ground streets of L'Manberg, only darker and mismatched, flags and banners hung proudly, and old steam powered machines pulsing and gleaming with the dull cast of copper, standing out against the rocky ground.

Neon blinks amidst it all, a strange contrast of old and new with gleaming lights stretching high above in long lines, lamps dangling to cast their red glow on the streets below.

On the walls caves several arched openings crowd identical to the one they're standing in, some decorative with walls just visible at the back where they carve out, others stretching long and barely lit into dark winding hallways.

There's no wind, banners hanging limp from wooden poles that span on the walls, the ropes holding them up stretching from cave entrance to cave entrance and-

Tommy stills at the sight of himself, the picture blown up with the green smile visible on the back of his hoodie, the words **TRAITOR** branded across it in dripping tar black colour, his own eyes roughly crossed out in an echo of its eyes.

It's smaller than others around it but it stands out starkly and his fingers twitches, curling unsurely at his side.

There's other pictures as well- a wanted poster of the Blood God blown wide with gleaming red eyes and axe hefted over his shoulder, caught with a grin over the shoulder of his red cloak beside a picture of Siren that hangs almost reverently from the placement of it, caught in a blurry two finger salute with a blue glowing hand.

His eyes linger for a long moment of a picture of Dream, one hand in the pocket of his hoodie, picture caught with him loose and relaxed, devil horns and tail drawn with a mocking downward twist of the smile of his mask.

"They really don't like Heroes here, do they?" Tommy breathes, gaze drifting, seeing slogans of freedom and revolution, different signs for hybrids climbing up and down the walls and-

He stares at a picture of a young Schlatt hangs untouched by graffiti or words, his horns dark against the brown of his hair, two golden hoops through the ram ears and dressed casually in

a leather jacket, helmet tucked beneath his arm, the angle strange, as if he was moving to greet someone but the background had been cut out.

Tommy had never seen Schlatt so young- he'd been in his twenties when he removed his mask on live television, leaving the mantle of Judge behind him with sharp suits and fancy ties, but Schlatt-

He had to be Tommy's age in the picture, sixteen, perhaps seventeen at *most*.

Tommy's mouth twists, leather creaking with the tight press of his knuckles against it.

"So, how are we getting down from here?" He turns to Techno, craning his head to find vivid red eyes already watch him.

His neck itches uncomfortably at the realisation.

"I can throw you if you want," the man offers with a baring of tusks. "It's the quick way down."

"I can shove you," Faux Pas breathes, just loud enough for Tommy to hear.

Tommy slowly turns to Eris who is covering their mouth with a politely raised hand, lowering it with a small twitch of acknowledgement at being caught.

"There's stairs leading down behind us," Eris informs him, taking a step back with a sweep of their arm out, cloak swishing and the grin on their mask stark. "Let me show you what the Pit has to offer, Red Chaos."

-

Down on the streets the red light casts an eerie glow and Tommy keeps pace at Techno's side, on his right, just like Siren favoured.

There's people moving, motion and whispers, fingers pointing and people drawing back to let them through as Techno moves with easy confident strides.

Hybrid features of all sorts spans around him – everything from tails and ears to those who moved on bipedal hooves or paws, snouts stretching out with twitching noses and shimmering scales bared open and without fear.

He peers curiously for any sign of wings, of feathers, looking for mob hybrids but-

He knows avians were rare in the first place, mob hybrids as well, and his gaze wanders from the lizard hybrid who clings to a wall with bare feet and hands, pressed behind them with wide eyes that trails their path, to a small group of young spider hybrids that whisper loudly from behind their mothers skirt with more arms than Tommy has time to count.

The air is humid around them, steam spilling down to wrap around their boots, lightened up in the red light above them.

“Isn’t that really-“

“I thought Dream had him-“

“Siren is back!”

Above him the banner of Red Chaos with crossed eyes and **TRAITOR** scrawled over it stares mockingly down at him

“How’s it possible-“

“- did you hear anything about-“

“Do you think Schlatt released him-?”

Tommy nearly misses a step but he catches himself, head moving to glance back at the teenager who was responsible for the words, their eyes meeting with a straightening of the dog hybrid’s head and shoulders.

He focuses ahead with a curling of his lips behind his mask.

“We’re already drawing a lot of attention,” Tommy says in an undertone to Techno. “I thought you were meeting with contact first.”

“I am,” Techno agrees with a hand that claps his shoulder, nearly tipping him from the sudden force of it. “*Behave*. Don’t get into too much trouble.”

What-

Tommy twists around but Eris hand is already settling on his shoulder with a squeeze that feels like a warning and reassurance in one as he’s pulled back with a sharp slide of his heel against the rocky ground.

“People are looking,” Eris breathes in an undertone as Tommy looks sharply back with a furious twist of his mouth behind the mask. “I’ll look after him,” Eris says louder with a small salute as Techno grabbed the back of Faux Pas’ poncho, jerking him back from where he’d been making an attempt to dodge away and forcing him into an awkward protesting stumble at his side, half-dangling with his legs and arms weaving through the air.

“I wasn’t going anywhere! I was just- taking in the sights!” Faux Pas protests, voice rising high.

“*Sure* you were,” Techno drawls with an unimpressed sigh as he hauled Faux into the mass of people that quickly swallow them up from sight, leaving Tommy standing alone with Eris in the midst of the Pit.

“You better give me one *damn* good explanation,” Tommy hisses, shifting with a small hard tug to free himself from the other’s touch with a glower, “as to why I’m here with *you*.”

Eris gives a small barely there shake of their head. “Not here,” they say and Tommy jerks, tensing as an arm slide into the crook of his, given an encouraging tug as the other takes a step. “Siren would look more relaxed,” Eris murmurs in a low voice, brown hair curling elegantly beneath their crown, longer and thicker than Wilbur’s.

“I’m not *feeling* very relaxed right now,” Tommy bites out but as he obligingly shifts his body language into something smoother he realises that Eris shoes had been traded into something with less height, further encouraging the illusion that he was supposed to be Siren.

Wilbur.

Fuck.

It’s strange to be without his hood to comfortably cast a shadow and he feels bare with just the red beanie, eyes and whispers trailing their path as Eris steers them closer to the tower that stretches from the very middle of the Pit.

“Blood God is entering one of the fighting pits,” Eris tells him after a long moment, voice low, their face betraying nothing on the topic of conversation. “You won’t be able to enter without an identifier.”

“How convenient,” Tommy mutters dryly.

They take a right, down a tight narrow space between two buildings where Eris comes to halt, sliding their arm out from his and taking a step back, giving him space.

“I volunteered to tour you around while they handle that,” Eris continues as Tommy watches them warily, one hand rubbing absently against his arm.

“Why?” he demands suspiciously. “What could you possibly have to gain from this?”

Eris reaches up, crown clattering to the ground before gloved hands pushing their sunglasses up and Tommy frowns at the sight of milky pale eyes, glowing faintly, a sure sign of the withering power that flowed through their veins.

His hand slips down to brush against the nearest vial on his belt.

“What are you-“

Eris’ hand slides down, fingers framing their grinning mask with a *click* before removing it completely, Tommy’s eyes widening in shock as their mouth curves in a smile at the reveal.

“We’ve met before Red Chaos,” the voice of the other rumbles pleasantly and achingly human free from the voice changer as the white glow fades to leave blue eyes. “Though you looked in much better shape then, even when you were clinging barefoot to the wall of the Tower.”

And-

Tommy stares at Eris, at *Royal*, the Number Four *fucking* Hero-

“Allow me to introduce myself properly.” One arm folds towards their midriff, the other stretching out before they swept into a bow, blue eyes never veering from his as brown curls brushes down their cheek.

“My name is Eret.”

Chapter End Notes

Heyo, I'm back again, and I'm just gonna clarify it here as well - the Egg is *history* in Hush. It's not a threat and will not make a return, it's just a pretty light source thanks to Bad who made the Pit before he pretty much withdrew from society which is why Philza doesn't know of him.

There's still a lot of history and plot to unravel in Hush and at this point I'm kinda side-eyeing the word count because we've got a lot ahead of us, but ayo. We keep on trucking.

The design of younger Schlatt in this chapter is very much inspired by fanart made by [Frogston](#) discord tag *Axeart*#9361

It's not posted anywhere that I know of atm but I adore it so thank you for sharing it with me and for the inspo<3

Serious thanks to the people who helped me figure out the descriptions this chapter because my inability to picture anything but a black void in my brain was murdering me, you're the best<3

Hope you're having a good one wherever you are out there<3

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If you're interested there's a [Hush Now Discord](#) that tends to go *brrrr* with the theories in designated channels and also have a lot of fun chatter and chill people on top of scoops of chaos with my lovely mods<3

You can find me on **tumblr** here: [corpse-art](#)
And I'm also on **twitter** now here: [corpsey_art](#)

I post a one hour countdown on all my social medias for a new chapter update if you're interested in such a thing :)

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DUDES. We have new Hush Now art!! They're all amazing. Go and give them all so much love<3

(And if I ever miss linking your art- pls let me know!! I try to make sure I keep track of everything but I am but human)

[Hush Now by_pigeon_exists](#) art

[FANART MASTERPOST](#)

Chapter 40

Chapter Notes

Someone requested an overview of the known secret identities so I'll fill this out properly at a later date and then post with each chapter:

Tommy - Red Chaos

Heroes:

Dream - Dream

404 - George

Valorant - Sapnap

Royal - Eret

Rose - Hannah

Schlatt - Schlatt (formerly Judge)

Villains:

Angel of Death - Phil

Blood God - Techno

Siren - Wilbur

Warden - Sam

Lethe - Ranboo

Judge - Tubbo

Jester - Quackity

Nemesis - Niki

Eris - Eret

Vigilantes:

Faux Pas - Fundy

Chronos - Karl

Kitten - TinaKitten

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It's been less than three hours since Tommy woke up and he stares at Eret's palms, free of gloves, turned up towards him.

How the fuck did I get here?

There's a squirming of hysteria clawing at him, lip trembling behind his mask before he bites down on it, fingers twitching in a looping counting pattern at the side of Siren's coat as he slowly bends closer, staring at the rose carved deep into the other's right palm, stained and flecked with black.

It's a lovely blooming pattern, delicate in its cruelty, in its meaning.

Royal, Eris, *Eret*, had killed people.

Just like the other member of the Syndicate.

Like *Wilbur*.

Just like other Heroes.

Except *Dream*.

"I'm a wither hybrid," Eret tells him, reaching to deftly drag up the right sleeve, pulling it up all the way to their elbow, revealing pale skin with black vines branching out like roots beneath. "It was revealed early what my power was, that I could kill someone with a single touch. But I was lucky."

The left sleeve gets the same treatment, revealing just a single line of faded black in the middle of their wrist.

"Someone saved you," Tommy hears himself saying distantly.

Just like Dream saved me.

"Someone saved me," Eret agrees, tone patient and eyes watchful. "You're acquainted with Captain Puffy, aren't you?"

Tommy's mouth twists. "Distantly. She isn't... too fond of me."

"She runs programs in the outer district to take care of powered children, keeping them fed and out of government hands. It's not an official thing, she's done her best to keep it under wraps if you will, but there's little information that escapes Jester's hands." Eret offers him a wan smile when Tommy flicks his gaze up. "She doesn't know, and I'd prefer to keep it that way, but it's thanks to her work and funding that I am where I am today."

And not locked up in Pandora, Tommy thinks, gloves creaking with the curl of his fingers.

They both know how the government works, how unforgiving it is of those who have powers deemed too dangerous.

"I'm lucky- my powers manifested in my right palm, the effect too weak to kill in my left. It was tricky to sell but with the right strings and connections, and money, I could claim my spot as a Hero." Eret's fingers brush over their left palm, over the faded lines of a mirrored rose far less harsh in its brand on their skin. "Officially, it's a paralyzing agent that mimics the effect of withering and I've made sure to keep Royal's record clean." A glance at him. "You wouldn't have sought me out otherwise, would you?"

A Hero that doesn't kill.

A Villain that does.

“Why tell me?” Tommy demands, ignoring the question and slouching back against the wall of the building with a twist of his lips and dark glower. “You could have just told me you were Royal-“

“Would it have been enough?” Eret interrupts him, voice steady and meeting his dark gaze calmly. “No matter how you look at it I’m a traitor, playing both sides.” They reach to slowly roll their sleeves down, securing them the buttons in place before brushing a hand down the fabric. “I’m a member of the Syndicate, a league of Villains feared by the government, and I am part of the government as one of their top ten Heroes, trusted to care for L’Manberg and the people in it.”

They’re not wrong. Tommy can’t for sure tell where their loyalties really lie and that makes them a volatile card. Even extending some level of trust to Royal had been something he’d gone back and forth with for days and now-

Eris-

Eret threw a whole other spin into it and Tommy wants nothing more than to duck his head into a pool of water and scream, maybe laugh, the urge smothered viciously under taught self-discipline.

Mission first.

Everything else can be dealt with after.

He can’t afford anymore weaknesses.

Tommy clings to it under his fracturing sanity, slouched beneath the crossed-out eyes of his own picture blown wide on the walls of the Pit.

“And I’m a Hero- former, whatever, working with Villains- I’m not exactly in a position to judge you,” he bites out.

“Perhaps not,” the other allows. “But you are in a position to decide how much trust you want to put in me.” Their chin is rested on top of their fingers with a look that *burns*. “And I am asking you, not as Eris, not as Royal, but as *Eret* to extend a bit of it to me.”

Tommy knows there’s a strange fascination with what he represents as Red Chaos, loyal and steady at Dream’s side in a business where loyalty and trust are hard to come by.

The thing is- Tommy’s trust and loyalty bloomed in loneliness, in desperation, in *selfishness*.

He’s not a good person, not even a good *Hero*.

He’s always just been Dream’s, putting his mentor’s values and ideas above that of L’Manberg and the people of the city, conspiring behind closed doors and dedicating his life to see Dream rise above them all and make something *better* as the Number One Hero.

We don’t kill.

It's Dream who brands the words into his soul, repeated until he mumbles them in his sleep and they both know why he does it, a quiet acknowledgement between them as Dream's eyes burns into his.

Tommy isn't an idiot, he knows how easily Dream could have put him on another path in life. But he learns from Dream's values, makes them his own, building *Tommy* from the no-name street orphan he'd been to finally make Red Chaos.

Tommy would kill for Dream and they both know it.

Red Chaos isn't allowed.

We don't kill.

"I don't do trust." Tommy's lips curls with a baring of small tusks behind his mask. "But it's a good try, *Eret*."

Surprisingly a smile curls the other's lips and Tommy's stares warily at them as Eret claps their hands together, pushing up from the crouch to straighten up.

"It's nothing less than what I'd expect from you, Red," Eret says almost *fondly* as they pull their gloves back on, hiding the marks on their palms before stretching a hand down towards him. "I guess, I'll just have to prove myself worthy of it then."

"Why?" Tommy demands.

"Because you need someone in your corner," Eret answers, blue eyes steady on his. "And I want to be that person."

"That answers *nothing*," he bites back, unimpressed. "Why the fuck do you care about what happens to me?"

Eret tilts their head. "I don't, not exactly. It's hard to care about someone you don't know. But I want to see what you can do, and I admit there's selfishness in my desire as well." The hand is drawn back, dragging through the mess of thick brown hair. "I have a sister, you know? You've met her- Nemesis."

Tommy's brow furrows. "She saved my life."

"She's always been kind," Eret's voice softens. "Too kind to be a Villain, some would say."

She hadn't felt very kind with water wrapping around him, drowning, trapped and struggling fruitlessly for air, struggling *to get to Dream* as the Blood God advanced on his mentor with a spin of his heavy axe.

But she's been kind when her water coiled down to ease his steps, sparing his dignity as he followed her out of the shopping mall, and she'd been kind when she treated his heel in the back of Jester's car.

"I always repay my favours."

Only- kind isn't the right word for it, Tommy thinks.

There's no such thing as too kind or too cruel, people are just messy and complicated in the way the world shapes them.

The world of Heroes and Villains are gritty, cruel, selfish and achingly *human*.

"She's always been certain in who she can trust, who she wants to follow, and joining the Syndicate came as an easy choice for her but- I've always wanted more than what I have." Self-depreciation, something *darker*, Eret bending down, two fingers hooking around the rim of the discarded crown and bring it up. "Being a Hero wasn't enough, being the Number Six Hero wasn't enough, being a member of the Syndicate wasn't *enough*."

Eret spins the crown, lifting it up with a press of their fingers tips and almost *reverently* crowns their own head with a closing of their eyes.

"I was born to be a King in a world where Kings are long gone," Eret murmurs, opening their eyes. "But you- *you* thrive in the shadow of Dream, content to just be at his side, to dedicate everything that you are to him. His faithful Knight."

"I'm no one's Knight," Tommy says with a twist of his lips.

"The Queen then?" Eret spreads their hands with a gleam in their eyes. "The strongest piece on the board that protects the King."

"Life isn't a chessboard."

Eret laughs, a low smooth thing. "No, it's not, but the comparison can be drawn, can it not? The Queen is the piece on the board that's the hardest to anticipate, moving where others cannot, but no matter how useful the Queen will be sacrificed for the survival of the King."

The other draws a breath, head turning up to look at the banners that dons the walls of the Pit.

"To be honest, I admire you Red. The King is surrounded by pieces that will protect them to the very end, it's an easy role to desire, but you- you became the Queen, the Knight, the Pawn for Dream, your loyalty to him an unfaltering thing even now."

Tommy claws the tips of his fingers against the inside of his wrist.

"The history of L'Manberg is still new, still *young*, leaving Manberg behind to enter an era of Heroes and Villains with the rise of powers." Eret leans back against the wall of the building behind them. "Do you think we'll live to regret it? Times have changed, but so have people. Not all people, but most."

"It's all I've known, what would I know?" Tommy snaps with irritation that crawls beneath his skin.

Eret regards him with intent eyes. "Don't you ever wonder what you might have been without your powers?"

“I’d be dead,” Tommy says flatly. “Can’t say it would have been a very interesting path to take.”

“And if you didn’t become a Hero?”

“I would have been *nothing*.”

“Or you could have been *everything*.” The words are heavy in the air between them. “You still could be,” Eret’s voice lowers. “You have the capacity to be more than this world could ever imagine.”

Something uncomfortable glows in Eret’s eyes and Tommy swallows the vitriolic protest that so desperately claws at him.

Because at the end of the day Tommy would have been *nothing* without Dream. Wouldn’t be *alive*.

Perhaps, in another world he might have been locked up in Pandora, or perhaps he’d been enrolled in the hero program, branded like property, his loyalty to the government, unable to pick apart what made him *Tommy* from their shaping.

Perhaps in another world he wouldn’t have grown up in the streets but instead raised by parents who loved him, would have been another child going to school, rushing out at the end of the day with friends at his side-

What ifs are *useless* because without Dream-

He wouldn’t even have been *Tommy*.

In this world he was fated to die on the streets and it’s only his meeting with Dream that spares him.

And he’s Tommy. He’s Red Chaos. He’s *Dream*’s because he decided he wanted to be, despite his mentor’s wishes, insisting stubbornly and arguing to be who he is today.

He made his choice, his loyalty earned by an older boy who names him and gives him *everything*.

He has no desire to stand at the top of the world, he’d always just wanted to be at Dream’s side, no matter what that meant.

At least-

At least that’s how it was supposed to be. Wilbur-

Fucking Wilbur.

“I *had* everything I wanted,” Tommy forces out, his voice heavy with too many feelings he can’t make sense of. “I don’t care about fame, or power, or fucking *money*. It means *nothing* to me.”

He takes pride in being a Hero because it had allowed him to stand at Dream's side instead of sitting around uselessly in their apartment.

Dream is his world and he's lost without him but Tommy is still fighting for what they'd been.

And he thinks- he *thinks* that Dream might be fighting too.

He has to believe it, to trust that the green scarf meant that Dream still cared even with harsh words and breaking ribs with neon green that swirls around his mentor when he's coughing up blood.

Has to believe it even when the betrayal had wrapped like thorns around his heart where he'd crouched over Siren's body, pleading for Dream to listen, to explain, to just tell him that everything was going to be okay.

"You interest me, Red Chaos," Eret tells him, one hand dragging through their hair. "Before today I didn't understand you. To give up everything for someone? That takes heart."

It's nothing but selfishness, a refusal to live in a world without Dream.

"Where are you doing with this," Tommy asks tiredly.

"I'm dragging this out," they admit, mouth twitching up. "The reason as to why I brought you here is selfish. I want your help, Red, to get Nemesis out of prison. To rescue my sister." Eret pushes off the wall with a roll of their shoulders. "Between staying a Hero, and her safety, there's an easy choice to be made."

Tommy narrows his eyes. "What are you saying exactly?"

Eret's mouth curls. "I intend to reveal the truth of Royal to the world." Their hands spread out, Tommy's heart pounding inside his chest. "It's been a good run but- Heroism has never suited me." A wave of their hand.

A headache claws up his neck from the tension of his shoulders as he stares at the older.

"You-"

"The thing is, I'm going to need your help, Red," Eret interrupts him, an easy calm in their face.

And-

Of course you do, Tommy thinks with a bitterness that runs bone deep with tiredness. *Just like everyone else.*

"I'm willing to pay for it of course- information, someone in your corner until the end of the week. If I can, I'll bring a message to you from Dream." Eret smiles at him. "I don't think I'm getting out of this one alive."

Tommy's mouth twists. "She'll never forgive you."

Their eyes meet with understanding, despite their differences.

"Perhaps I'll survive," Eret says with a self-depreciating smile.

The government will hunt you to your death, Tommy thinks but does not say.

They both very well know that the Hero Commission would never allow Eret to stay alive after playing them for fools. They couldn't afford it.

The Number Six Hero Royal, trusted and adored by the public in their regal wear and lion masks couldn't be Eris and still live.

"Perhaps I'll take Schlatt down with me." Eret fishes their sunglasses out of their pocket, snapping them out and sliding them in place to hide their eyes. "I have no grudge against Dream, quite the opposite, he's admirable. In some ways I aspired to be him." A pause. "He claimed the throne I wanted to be mine but at least he was a better candidate than Schlatt."

I should stop you, Tommy thinks, staring at them. *A good Hero-*

"She's part of the Syndicate, they're going to help her, aren't they? Isn't that why we're here."

"They will," Eret agrees, stepping towards him. "But there are things that are being kept from you, Red Chaos."

"What-"

"The Syndicate isn't just rescuing Siren, Nemesis and Jester from Pandora," Eret interrupts him. "They're preparing to go to *war*."

Tommy sees himself reflected in the black sunglasses, clad in a miserable masquerade of a Villain.

"And they're planning to use you as the trigger."

-

"Do you know what the Pit is?" They take a step back, leaning against the wall of the house behind them with a gaze that burns bright with belief. "It's history. It represents things that once were. Things that could be. New beginnings, old stories. Leaders, lives... victories, losses, wars... and the future that it will hold. There's a million of things the government would want forgotten and gone but things get preserved here, like a living museum of artifacts and preserved words."

"A lot of things are gone though." Tommy props his elbow on his knee, chin dropped into the palm of his hand. "Dream did a lot of research about L'Manberg and there's so much shit that doesn't match up or is just- fucking *gone*."

“There’s more than one reason as to why the government want the Pit gone.” Eret folds their arms across their chest, crown gleaming in the dull red light above them. “Things they’ve worked to erase, to scrub history clean from, hiding their shame with propaganda and rewritten books to make their own reality.” Eret lowers their head to meet his gaze. “L’Manberg is built on a history of lies.”

Tommy snorts.

“Can’t say I’m surprised.” He brushes a palm over his heart, feeling the press of gold like warmth against his skin. “Faux Pas- he said that, there is another reason as to why Schlatt wants Siren.”

Eret considers him. “I don’t know much about it,” they admit finally. “It’s largely been kept under wraps and only reason I know what I *do* know is because Faux Pas turned to me after getting thrown out of the Syndicate.”

“What is it?” Tommy demands, heart pounding inside his chest.

The other Hero drags their palm down over their mouth, sliding down to frame their chin before dropping completely with a sigh. “What do you know of the making of the history of L’Manberg exactly?”

Tommy furrows his brow. “Not much.” He hesitates. “It’s said- *Dream* he said that it’s a city built by Villains.”

Eret startles, visibly surprised with a shift of their feet. “He’s well informed, it’s more than what most know.” They glance at the mouth of the alley they’re still in but save for people wandering past there’s nothing to be seen. “Before L’Manberg became what it is today it was simply known as Manberg. It was changed with the era of Heroes and Villains and from what little records I’ve been able to find on it, the ones heading the build of it was one of the old families from the founding days of Manberg.”

They wave their hand.

“Something happened,” they say succinctly. “Don’t know what- all records are gone. But it’s something the government has been keen on keeping under wraps and from my understanding of it Siren is the last living member of that family.”

“It’s my mom’s last name,” Wilbur had told him, a wet brush of blue paint beneath his chin. *“Legally I’m Wilbur Soot Watson because when Phil adopted me and all he let me decide whether I wanted to keep it or not so, I made it my middle name.”*

“Why-“ Tommy’s hands clenches tight and there’s anger, possessiveness and protectiveness alike wiring thick around his heart. “Why the *fuck* would that even matter?”

“That’s something only the history of L’Manberg can tell us.” With the mask and sunglasses back in place it’s impossible to read them but Tommy’s neck prickles under their gaze. “But the moment Siren became a Villain he made himself an enemy of L’Manberg. If they found out about his heritage it’s just one more reason to silent him.”

Fuck that, Tommy thinks viciously. *Whatever his family did has nothing to do with him.*

“He would have been fucked even if he didn’t become a Villain then?” Tommy grits out.
“They would just-“

He bites down hard on the inside of his cheek, too sharp teeth tearing through the flesh, far too aware that he’s being too transparent with his feelings that burns hotly beneath his skin, tail tightening around his midriff.

“You can’t place the sins of the family on the children,” Tommy forces out, tugging at the hem of Wilbur’s beanie, missing his hood more than ever, face far too bare. “That’s just dumb.”

“It is,” Eret agrees after a long moment.

He can’t afford not working with the Syndicate for Wilbur.

He can’t afford trusting them for Dream.

A war is coming and Tommy-

He wonders how much of L’Manberg will remain the same in the aftermath.

-

He wonders, silently, how much of *him* will still remain.

-

Tommy doesn’t trust Eret.

A Hero.

A Villain.

“I was born to be a King in a world where Kings are long gone.”

A want to be *King*.

Eret had been playing both sides from the get-go, by their own words driven by want and hunger for more, never satisfied.

Tommy doesn’t quite trust that they were willing to give it all up, no matter how they’d tried to spin it as a change of heart, a want to *change* in self-sacrifice for their sister.

If there’s something Tommy think he *can* trust it’s that Eret was planning on revealing Royal to the world as something they were not but there’s so much that can go fucking wrong with it.

And-

There are things that are not adding up.

On some level he understands the words that get fed to him with confidence, inviting him to believe them, *to work with them*.

He glances at Eret who walks confidently at his side, at ease here in the Pit as Eris, shoulders settled proud and crown gleaming in the red light.

“And they’re planning to use you as the trigger.”

Us, Tommy finds himself thinking, tasting it out. *And they’re planning to use **us** as the trigger.*

Nausea crawls up his throat at the thought, of Dream’s reaction to it but-

Tommy hasn’t gotten where he is today by trusting every fucking thing said to him but he’s not so foolish to write everything off completely either.

Eret was anticipating some sort of commotion and Tommy is all too aware that he’s playing to the whims of the Villains around him while anticipating his own chance to act in whatever the *fuck* they have planned.

Jester, Nemesis-

Wilbur.

There’s so much happening too fast and the panic crawls like ants beneath his skin, the weight of it terrible on his shoulders.

He wants Dream.

He *needs* Dream to tell him *what the fuck* he’s supposed to *do* because Red Chaos was never meant to function on his own.

His brow dips, glancing up at the giant poster of himself, at what he is and represents, the smile neon green on the back of his red hoodie.

“They didn’t always hate you here,” Eret says beside him.

Tommy flinches minutely, peering cautiously towards them from the corner of his eyes.

“Why do they- what changed?”

Did I-

“I don’t think you understand quite how big of an influence and reputation Red Chaos have,” Eret says after a moment, something pensive in their voice. “You’re a Hero but you never claimed a rank for yourself, dedicated to doing the right thing, always at Dream’s side.” A pause. “Civilians pay more attention to us than we think, outside the headlines in the papers. They saw that you weren’t in it for the money or the fame and yet, outside the Pit, your

loyalty was disparaged, envied and mocked with headlines that reduced you to little more than a faithful dog.”

Eret takes a right, guiding them closer to the tower that stretches up in a wicked and macabre dance of black metal, the red light twined like a sharp web through it all.

Somewhere above them the Hero tower rises white and spiraling where it stretches towards the sky in the middle of L’Manberg, awe inspiring in its pristine gleam.

“Down here in the Pit you were celebrated as one of the last true Heroes,” Eret says in a low undertone, tone impossible to read. “You even turned against Dream to protect Siren and then-“

“Everything went to shit,” Tommy interrupts, uninterested in hearing it.

“More than that.” Eret’s head tilts, sunglasses angling towards him with a glance. “They think you’ve forsaken them by donning Dream’s smile on your back despite what he’s doing.”

Tommy stares up at the dark scrawl of *TRAITOR*.

“They’re the fools if they ever expected me to abandon Dream,” he says with a vicious curl of his lips. “Perhaps they’re right to call me a dog because my loyalty is to him and him *alone*.”

Liar, a voice that sounds suspiciously like Techno’s mocks him and he swats at it.

Because *fuck* it if he’s about to stick around and try to unnest the knotted tangled mess of emotions that ties him to Wilbur and Dream alike.

Whatever emotional attachment he has to Wilbur is all *Tommy*.

Red Chaos- his loyalty is to one man and one man alone and Tommy- he’s gotta believe that or the fractures of pieces of sanity he’s clinging to will all shatter beneath him.

I’m fine, he tells himself.

Liar, Wilbur mocks him and Dream’s wheezing laughter drifts at the back of his mind.

Tommy isn’t so sure he believes himself anymore.

There’s something eerie about being watched but not approached, his skin itching under the attention, at the way people draw back, the taste of anticipation in the air and he resists the urge to glance back.

“You’re more than you think you are,” Eret says cryptically, arm sliding around Tommy’s shoulder and drawing him closer, his neck surreptitiously angled down with the weight of their arm.

Adversary. Two. On your Six.

His earpiece is quiet and Tommy's shoulders curl tense before he forces them to loosen up.

Intercept? He signs back with a quick sweeping motion and open palm smacking down on his other in a cut-off motion.

There's frustration wired into his bones, a buzz of thoughts he's desperate to quiet, and he licks his lips as he latches onto the anticipation that bubbles with the adrenaline that rises quick with the beating of his heart.

Dream had never liked Enforcers.

Tommy- he'll take whatever fucking excuse there is at this point.

Eret cocks their head. "How about we start off this party early?"

Tommy's reaching for the first vial as Eret releases him, their cloak a shimmering cast of gold with their turn, gloves being pulled off as Tommy pops the cork of the vial and unseals Siren's mask, moving it out just enough to get the vial to his lips.

Iron spills over his tongue, swallowed down with power that floods through his veins with blood spilling down his neck as his skin splits open to give space for the gills that flutters with a breath drawn through lungs pooling with water.

His eyes shimmers bright blue behind his contacts when he opens them up, grin stretching wide at the sheer rush as he spreads his arms wide, embracing the cocky arrogance of the Villain whose uniform he wears as the Enforcers levels guns towards them.

"You came all the way here for me?" His voice drips of Siren's syrupy mockery as he takes a step forward, water rumbling eagerly to with a turning of his palms up. "You *really* shouldn't have."

He tenses his fingers, feeling the water coiling in response, bursting up as he yanks his palms *up* and there's shouts of surprise, shock clear as water bursts from below ground, flooding out to rise like walls on either side of the Enforcers who throws their guns to the ground, one already reaching for their power that shines yellow in a pooling of energy in their palm.

Blue cloaks with red trims, a golden mask and caps pulled low.

He stands in Siren's gear, an echo of them, and he clenches his jaw tight.

It's months of frustration, of anger, of helplessness.

It's betrayal, it's fury, it's guilt and a horrible jagged feeling of being pulled in two opposite directions.

It's the fear and humiliation from the two weeks stuck in a miserable room with his bones broken over and over again, a coiling thing inside of him clawing to be free.

The gum around his tusks aches, his tail squeezing tight as his mouth twists in an ugly thing.

“You don’t belong here,” he snarls, dragging it all down on top of their heads with the gentleness of a raging tsunami.

-

Techno lowers himself down and fishes up the bracelet out of his pocket, a simple thing of silver, and places it down on the table between them before drawing his hand back slowly, observing the other.

White eyes peers out from a dark hood with red rim, small black pointy horns and a tail that coils long with an arrow at the very end.

“How did you find me?”

“I told no one!” Fundy exclaims defensively, shoving the chair he’d claimed between them out and slumping down. “I don’t even want to be here,” he mutters quietly, silencing after a warning glance, bushy tail tucking tight against his leg.

“I got my tip off from someone who has a *close* relation to you,” Techno says with a curling grin that bares large tusks. “He was all too willing to divulge the information after realizing the cost of your actions.”

White eyes, lacking a pupil, glows eerily in the dim light.

“The Blood God, better known as Technoblade, one of three leaders of the Villain organization known as the Syndicate. I know you.” A tilt of the demon’s head. “You’re Philza’s youngling.”

Techno laughs, a gravel sound as he leans back. “I see my reputation proceeds me.”

“I might not involve myself in human business these days but my child keeps me up to date,” the demon tells him with a lilting voice, placing both hands down on the table, skin as black as the night with clawed tips.

“And this isn’t involving yourself in human business?” Techno challenges, tapping a finger against the table where the wrap of silver rests innocently, his own red eyes gleaming with the pulsing anticipation of the Blood God beneath his skin.

It's all too easy to recall the picture Theseus had made, the axe tearing through his flesh, blood spilling wet against the floor, a reckless heaving desperation flaring bright in his blue eyes.

Kill him, Chat urges, voices rising and crowding with eagerness.

We’ve never killed a demon before

Today could be the first

Show him where he belongs

Scrape his flesh from your boots

Consume his blood

I bet it's warm

Hot and burning

Like a cup of hot chocolate on a cold winter day

Chat titters when he mentally flicks them off.

“I know every enchantment I’ve made,” the demon tells him, head lowering and a single finger dragging gently over the rim of the bracelet. “There is only two bracelets like this one made and its twin I activated only days after this one deactivated.”

The curl of black lips are barely visible in the cast of shadow but a small fang peaks out, needle sharp and eyes glowing.

“Where is he?”

Chapter End Notes

The amount of dialogue in this chapter lowkey murdered me a bit but I think I'm pretty pleased with the end result of it all.

Tommy is- well, he could be doing better but at least he's being allowed to blow off some steam. A bit earlier than planned but you know, good for him.

And, look at that, Techno managed to track down one evasive demon who has been staying out of things because Sapnap . Bad is- he's a tricky guy, I'm looking forward to finally getting to introduce him a bit more properly.

Remember.

Don't take everything at face value :)

On that note, I hope you're having a lovely morning/evening wherever you are in the world<3 and thank you guys for the endless support, your comments, art, excitement and appreciation of hush- it makes it so very fun to write<3

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If you're interested there's a [Hush Now Discord](#) that tends to go *brrrr* with the theories in designated channels and also have a lot of fun chatter and chill people on top of scoops of chaos with my lovely mods<3

You can find me on **tumblr** here: [corpse-art](#)
And I'm also on **twitter** now here: [corpsey_art](#)

I post a one hour countdown on all my social medias for a new chapter update if you're interested in such a thing :)

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DUDES. We have new Hush Now art!! They're all amazing. Go and give them all so much love<3

(And if I ever miss linking your art- pls let me know!! I try to make sure I keep track of everything but I am but human)

[L'Manberg by Flying_Solo143](#) art

[Siren is back in town by PlantChecker](#) art

[My Sons by PlantChecker](#) art

[FANART MASTERPOST](#)

Chapter 41

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

You know

Tommy's heart pounds, Nemesis powers swirling around him, a headache spanning across his skull that feels too cramped with the dark drip of the Blood God's voice.

They say it's self-preservation that makes a dog bare its teeth

He throws his hand up, the water rising too eagerly, lacking control, responding all too willingly to the hunger that isn't his but creeps beneath his skin, wrapping around his bones like sharp dragging thorns.

"You have nothing better to do?" Tommy snarls back, twisting, arm dragging and water rushing down the streets, bubbling and frothing in its vengeance as it collides against an Enforcer's body, sending them down, another pulse dragging their floppy half-extended limbs like a bedragged doll to send them colliding hard against the bricks.

He clenches his fist with force, struggling to reign back control as Eret's cloak flares at the corner of his eye, the ugly sound of a bone breaking making him flinch, turning just in time to see Eret's right hand wrap around a bare neck.

Blank hollow eyes meets his beneath a low pulled cap and his stomach twist at the sight of black veins crawling up paling skin, spreading like a web without a single sound of protest as Eret lets go of them, body crashing to the ground with a splash, dead within seconds.

Gone, just like that.

Tommy stares down at them numbly, water rolling wetly to send their body sliding across the ground, coat drenched.

Eret wipes their hand off on their pants, water swirling around them both as they slowly turn towards Tommy and there's no regret, no second thought to the life they'd just taken.

"That... isn't how they normally respond," Eret says instead with a note of ill-ease in their voice.

"Withering- it's painful, isn't it?" Tommy forces out, spreading his palms out, jaw clenching as the water struggles against the frail control he has on it, casting its shadow in the frothing rise from the ground to weave around them in the air like a giant blaring *WE'RE RIGHT HERE*.

It's one of the most painful ways to die, the Blood God's voice rumbles, too loud, his shoulders bunching tight in response. **One of the most boring ways as well**, he says with distaste.

Because there's no blood? Tommy shoots back distractedly, shifting to put his back to Eret despite the way his skin crawls with itching paranoia, instincts making his tail curl tight around his midriff.

They killed that Enforcer without regret and nausea claws up his throat because he'd done *nothing*.

They don't call me the Blood God for nothing

"It is," Eret responds, shifting with a splash of their boots, water swirling and dripping and the streets emptied out. "If there's another Hero down here this is sure to drag them out at least."

Tommy's neck burns warningly and he fumbles one hand down for his belt, grabbing for a second vial and uncorking it with a flick of his thumb before forcing it beneath the mask, downing it before his body could start rejecting the gills fluttering against the wet bandages Phil had secured in place.

He claws them off, dropping them into the water swirling around their feet, drawing a breath that bubbles with the water in his lungs.

The Enforcer he'd sent crashed into the wall twitches, pressing up from the ground and Tommy flicks two fingers, the water crashing into them like a baseball bat, sending them crashing through a window with a shattering of glass with a huff.

"Idiot, should have stayed down," he mutters to himself before stiffening.

A chill is spreading quickly through the air, misting his breath, and he throws his hand out, water surging out to crash against rapidly forming ice that spreads up it as he casts his hand high, sending the water twisting down hard in a clump of ice that shatters as Eret grabs the back of his coat and yanks him several steps back.

"McChill."

"I know," Tommy hisses back as the Number Seven Hero steps into view, robust with hard muscles that presses against his dark shirt, armour spanning across his chest with leather straps over his shoulders and bottoms ones that secure into a thick tool belt.

A yellow jacket is shrugged above it, cans sticking out of the pockets.

Long brown hair tied back in his neck, black clothed mask pulled over their nose, and a icicles growing out sharp between his fingers, goggles in green and a purple scarf wrapping thick up their neck.

"I don't know who you are," McChill says, voice ringing out clearly. "But you've just given me the perfect excuse to fuck this place up *real good*."

Tommy bares his teeth behind his mask, anger prickling sharp beneath his skin in a rising fury because *what the fuck* was such a high ranked Hero doing down in the Pit if not working for *Schlatt*.

“It’s about time you crawled out of your hidey hole,” Eret’s voice rings out and McChill focuses on them.

“*Eris*, ” he greets, ice spreading lazily over the rooftop from the bottom of his feet. “Oh Rose is going to be *impossible* to deal with once she finds out she missed out on this.”

“She’s involved in this as well then?” Eret’s hands are bare, the water swirling around them both, lapping at their feet and dripping heavily from Tommy’s lack of control.

“You know, doing a bit of pest control, part of the Hero work and all,” McChill says with a laugh.

“The only pest I see here is *you*,” Tommy scoffs, coat swishing and mouth twisting with too many teeth behind his mask. “I’m sure we can spare the time to take care of this rat problem, don’t you agree, Eris?”

This is looking a bit more interesting at least, The Blood God rumbles with dark interest.

Eris steps in front of him as he dips a hand down for a third vial, water shivering in the air as he throws his head back, downing it, glass breaking where he throws it on the ground, drawing a breath that rattles with sweat that bead on the back of his neck, a cold clamor.

He spreads his hands out, water spanning eagerly as more and more ice spreads from McChill’s feet, crawling down the roof edge.

“This is a bad match-up,” Tommy says in a low undertone, taking a step closer to Eret.

“All I need is one touch.” Eret turns their head, sunglasses hiding their eyes and mask covering their expression. “Can you make it happen?”

“Left or right?” Tommy demands, refusing to look at the Enforcer dead in the water that laps at them like a discarded toy on a beach.

He might not like McChill, their interactions had been few, but what little he knew about the man he was the sort to piss on someone’s grave and laugh about it.

It doesn't mean Tommy wants him dead though.

“Left,” Eret ways in a low undertone. “We need him for information,” they add.

“Okay,” he breathes back, adrenaline surging through him with the rapid beating of his heart. “I can make that happen,” Tommy decides.

Oh? The Blood God drawls with a rattling of his teeth. **Better make it interesting, whelp.**

Oh I’ll make it interesting alright, Tommy thinks with a clenching of his jaw.

Water pools beneath his feet, fingers curling tight before he propels himself up, twisting, palms aimed down towards his fellow Hero with ice that shoots rapidly to meet him with the bubbling tsunami of roaring water.

-

Techno draws a breath, eyes on Red Chaos who uses the water to propel himself through the air, landing with a slide over ice already crumbling, jumping off it, twisting with a crouching of his knees to send himself like a pin missile against the back of McChill who is moving too slow, ice not forming fast enough to stop the knees that slams violently against into his shoulders with a cracking of too thin ice.

Theseus is already twisting, one hand grasping tight onto the yellow jacket, agile as he avoids the sharp icicle that shoots out, one booted foot pressing down roughly on the side of the belt for purchase, the other knee looped around to slam into the other Hero's face with not an inch of hesitation in his body language.

It's quick, brutal, repeated even as an icicle pierces through his thigh, tearing straight through with blood that gleams wet against the ice.

Techno fastens his steps as Theseus fingers sinks harshly into dark hair, McChill wobbling on steps beneath him, blood splattered up his face but fingers spreading out behind him, ice swirling and-

"Behind you!" Techno rumbles out in warning and there's not a second of hesitation before the Hero rolls bodily down over McChill's shoulder, the icicle piercing deep through the man's shoulder with a howl as Theseus scrambles back, panting with eyes that turns towards him, glowing brightly beneath the brown lenses.

Oh he's in deep

Look at him

His pupils are blown wide, Chat titters breathlessly in admiration and amusement.

Theseus steps back as Eret's hand seals around McChill's wrist, attentive on Techno who raises a brow behind his mask, instincts prickling with interest as he observes the other's heaving breaths, clad in a masquerade of his brother.

"Did-" Theseus' voice rasps, too thick, words clumsy in the way they're forced out of his mouth. "Did good?" His voice raises at the end, eyes never veering from Techno's, a thin sheen of sweat visible on his brow.

Theseus goes pale, mask barely shoved open just enough to vomit up water that expels forcefully, coughing with a low wretched sounds that sounds like torn sandpaper.

He looks strangely small where he stands, chest heaving, no longer at Dream's side but alone, lost without a shadow to hide in.

A follower, not a leader.

Techno takes a step forward, and then another, tail uncoiling to flick behind him.

Theseus blinks as Techno ducks, arm looping around his back, Theseus' arm circling around his neck instinctively with a surprised stutter of his breath as Techno took the brunt of his weight to a low exhausted shudder.

His neck is bleeding on either side, gills turning black, rejected by his body as the power had run its course, trembling in clothes half drenched, icicle sticking out of his thigh and frost clinging to his coat.

His fingers are red, gloves torn with small scratches where ice had shaved his skin roughly.

A low breath, head angling towards him with a shiver, the aftermath of crashing adrenaline and instincts creeping on him fast and Techno's mouth curls.

Runt, his instincts croons.

Runt, Chat chitters in agreement.

"Yeah," he tells Theseus with a low rumble, drawing the Hero closer with a lowering of his face and a rough *chuff*. "You did *good*."

-

"Any luck?"

Tommy sits, pants kicked off on the floor and trying not to feel awkward where he's seated half-swaddled in his boxers, still wearing Siren's coat and button-up with Techno's ridiculous big soft red cloak wrapped around him.

He buries his chin into it, keeping a careful eye on Techno who is wiping his skin clean of blood and-

He's brought back to those two months ago, the Blood God himself out cold on his couch after Tommy had been enough of an idiot to drag him home because he'd been so miserable on his own even a Villain had been a relief from the silence.

He'd been a stranger then and now-

Wilbur's brother.

"We met up with the contact," Techno tells him, pinching the skin together and threading the needle deftly through his skin with far more elegance than the Angel of Death. "Despite you two being trigger happy."

Red eyes meet his and Tommy grimaces at him.

"Here." A can of cola presses against the back of his neck and he jerks, swearing as he directed a glower at Eret whose mouth twitches, passing by with a swish of their golden cloak after Tommy snatched the can from their hand with a low grumble.

There's gouges and old scars on his thigh, a pattern that's unmistakable where it spreads out beneath Techno's hand as he works.

He'd been punctured by the deadly feathers of the Angel of Death that had left him looking like a feathered hedgehog.

It'd been less than a year ago and yet-

Most of them have whitened, fading into his skin, rough to the touch, but Tommy is far too used to see the violence painted on his skin to feel much more than a brief moment of resignation as he looks at the round hole left by the icicle that had gone through his leg just above his knee.

"It's a miracle it didn't fuck something up," he says, mostly to break the silence, unable to sit and be stew with his own fucking thoughts. "I mean, at least I can wiggle my toes and shit."

The bite mark on his shoulder aches dully along with the patched wounds from the rejected gills but it's a reminder.

I'm alive, I'm alive, I'm alive-

It's one of the few things that he'd been truly been allowed to feel on the streets- the cold, the hunger, the *pain* that gnawed on his very bones with bruised skin as he chewed down scavenged food.

Survival grained into his very being.

He stares at the wound being tugged shut, something beating dully inside of him.

I've gotten reckless. It's an admittance to himself, quiet where no one can hear it. *Careless.*

Desperation and anger overriding reason.

It had felt... good. In the moment.

The Blood God's blood thirst lingers with an ache in his teeth, the mark around his wrist still warm.

"Through dumb luck," Techno grunts, bent needle looping through flesh and fat, the feeling of the thread being pulled through making his muscles twitch. "You were careless."

Blood red eyes meet his.

"Your instincts got the better of you," the man tells him in a low voice, meant for him and him only. "But at least you had enough wits about to listen to me."

The approval snakes warm around his heart where it doesn't belong and Tommy ducks his head with a grumble.

He glances at McChill who sits slumped over, pierced by his own ice but still alive, bruised and drenched with blood that stains his yellow jacket dark where the icicle had gone straight through his shoulder.

Eret and Techno had secured him up, long hair hanging limp, breath rasping and groaning audible, boots digging into the wooden floor in a fruitless attempt to push away as Eret poured more blood clotting powder around the slowly melting icicle.

It sticks out morbidly, unlike the one in his thigh that Techno had done short work with yanking out the moment he was sitting down despite his grumbled protest of *keeping it in stops the bleeding you idiot-*

He wiggles his bare toes, trying not to feel like an idiot where he sits.

He wants his pants back.

“Is he- will he be okay?” Tommy asks, hating the unsurety that creeps into his voice as he eyes the other Hero whose eyes are rolling, jerking in the bonds as Eret delicately eases the icicle out of his shoulder, yanking it the last bit before pouring more blood clotting powder, pressing down with a heavy rag that soaks thick with blood.

Heroes might produce blood faster than normal people thanks to their boosters but as long as the amplified adrenaline was pounding through them they would also bleed faster, heavier.

Dream had taught him to calm his heart, to ease his breathing after a mission, and it’s second nature at this point, something he doesn’t have to think about.

“He’ll live,” Eret says and Tommy’s shoulders ease down, blowing out a harsh breath as he slumps back with a small shiver he suppresses with a clenching of his jaw.

The last knot gets secured on his thigh, the black thread, reinforced to hold through the work they do, gets snipped off at the end before Techno raises tall from his crouch.

He steps towards McChill as Tommy drags the cloak tighter around himself, watching with tension running thick through him.

Techno bends down, fingers grasping brown hair and yanking McChill’s head back, the Number Seven Hero’s eyes rolling with a groan of pain and a jerk in his bonds.

Tommy drags his knees childishly under the red fluffy cloak, trying not to think too hard about the semblance of Techno throwing him a heavy red blanket in the car he’d picked him up in only weeks earlier.

It feels like a lifetime ago and yet, only yesterday.

“He won’t be very useful for an hour or so at least,” Techno snorts, releasing McChill roughly. “Works out well enough.”

“How so?” Eret inquires curiously with a tilt of their head.

“The contact we met up with won’t talk unless we bring Red Chaos here along.” Techno’s red eyes locks onto his, burning with something Tommy can’t place. “He was quite insistent.”

Tommy stares at him, mouth curling behind his mask.

“How the fuck do they even know I’m with you?” he demands suspiciously.

Techno’s hand dips into his pocket, pulling out the power dampener, fingers spanning around the edge of it.

“Sapnap was kind enough to supply us with the location of the person who made this.”

Tommy jerks, bare legs kicking out, feet slapping on the floor as he staggered to his feet, fingers grasping white-knuckled onto the cloak as the can of cola hit the floor.

“Where?” The fury crawls thick through him. “Where the *fuck* is he!?” he snarls out, tail lashing behind him.

Techno flicks the bracelet, red eyes never veering away from him.

“I sense a history.”

“The only fucking thing you’re sensing is my deep fucking desire to stab the guy,” Tommy growls, nails clawing deep into the red fur of the cloak, right arm aching in phantom pain of the blade of the axe that had turn through it. “Do you have any fucking idea what he did to me, Blade!?” he snarls.

If it wasn’t for Bad-

His right arm presses tighter against his body, hidden by the cloak and gloves, but it doesn’t mean he isn’t painfully aware of it, the tuft of his tail brushing at his ankles with a tense flick and small baby tusks pressing against his lips.

He’ll never be the same again.

All because Bad had-

He’d trusted Bad on some level, not as much as he trusted Dream but-

He’s nine when he first meets the demon, tasting the strawberry sweet Bad slips him with curiosity and-

In some ways, Bad is the closest he ever comes to having a parental figure in his life.

Bad and Sapnap’s interactions something he watched with cautious curiosity, pretending not to see the way Dream turns more than once to the demon, frustrated with seeking reassurance that he was doing the right thing with words muffled words through the door Tommy waits behind, staring out the window at the neon sign that blinks just outside, advertisement changing during the years as he grew older.

Bad never ages but Dream grows taller, as does Tommy, until Bad looks small behind the desk and they're both standing on their own two feet.

"Are you sure this is what you want to do?" Bad had only asked once when the decision of the making of Red Chaos had already been made.

"I'm sure," Tommy had responded confidently, twelve-years-old and daring the demon to protest.

But Bad hadn't protested, white eyes glowing inside the darkness of the dark cast of his hood.

"If you think it's the right path for you, I will not stand in your way," Bad had told him, lowering his head with a closing of his eyes. *"I can only trust that you know what you're doing."*

Violence wraps dark around his heart, the betrayal a brand against his wrist where the Blood God's mark rests instead of the metal shackle.

"He's a liar," Tommy bites out, his voice thick. "A liar and a *thief*."

"Have I told you about the Nether? It was my home." Longing, a quiet kind of solemnness in the demon's voice. *"Red rocks spreading as far as the eye could see, lava instead of water flowing like great rivers. It was so hot that water would evaporate within minutes and it was a brave soul indeed who would enter the domain, even prepared with armour, weapons and shield, for it was protected and loved by those who lived there."*

Techno's eyes burns into his and Tommy stares back, his breathing harsh.

"He robbed you of something that was intricately yours," Techno's voice rumbles, eyes darkening, mouth curling with sharp tusks that gleams with the gold that circles them. "Something he had no right to take."

Tommy falters at that, fingers easing their death hold to draw it defensively across his chest with a hunching of his shoulders.

"I know, Theseus." Techno steps towards him and Tommy jerks back, not fast enough because a hand settles warm against the back of his neck, halting him in place as Techno lowers his head to catch his eyes. "It was cruel of him but he has information we need."

Tommy bristles, wrestling heavily against the parts of him that wants nothing more than to sink his teeth into the arm just inches from his mouth.

He knows he can't. Siren's mask lacks the design, the metal teeth of his own, but it doesn't lessen the craving for an outlet for the violence that crawls jagged beneath his skin.

"What kind of information?" Tommy bites out finally, a tremble running through him. "Because I'm not really on a *talking* kind of vibe with the guy at the moment so it better be something good."

“There’s a second one of those bracelets out there,” Techno says, thumb stroking against the baby hairs on his neck to a shiver that runs through him, skin prickling with an anxious swish of his tail behind him. “We need any kind of information we can get out of him.”

Tommy licks his lips, *like an nervous dog licking its chops*, he thinks with some self-depreciation and humor that falls flat with a twist of his lips.

“You think he might have put one on Siren?” he musters out, hyperfocused on the soft touch, such a contrast against the violence, his instincts crooning, urging him to press into it with a lidding of his eyes that he wrestles against.

It’s not Wilbur but it’s the closest he can get to his friend, here and now, with his brother’s towering form in front of him treating him so gently.

It’s manipulative, he hates it, but he can’t help but crave it all the same.

He’s tired of hurting.

He’s tired of *thinking*.

He’s going to use me, Tommy reminds himself, the tip of his tail brushing against his ankle. *I’m expendable*.

He always have been, per design that’s what Red Chaos *is*.

A tool, a weapon, something to the pointed and set loose.

For Wilbur, he reminds himself, steeling his shoulders.

“What to you need me to do?” he hears himself asking, raising his head and looking into those red eyes that glimmers with emotions he doesn’t understand at his surrender.

-

The streets are suspiciously empty and Techno takes shortcuts that brings them out of the few dawdling people’s sight, rarely using the main streets, Siren’s coat heavy on Tommy’s shoulders.

“There are more Enforcers around,” Tommy mutters as they step back out under the red light cast from above, spying a blue cloak disappear out of sight. “Shouldn’t we take care of them?”

“We need them to report to Schlatt,” Techno tells him with a grunt. “We’ve already spread the word for people to stay out of it.” A huff. “I wanted to have this meeting taken care of first but we’re just gonna have to speed things up.”

Tommy’s thigh aches with every step but it’s a familiar thing, just another wound tallied up, and it’s a reminder to himself as he glances up, once again, at the poster of himself as Red Chaos.

“You think they’ll send someone down here?” he wonders.

“We’re counting on it,” Techno tells him after a moment, and they’re nearing the very middle of the tower that rises macabre in the middle of the Pit. “Angel is keeping an eye on the main entrance which we suspect they’ve been using to get in here.”

“I thought it was shut down?”

“It was.” Techno’s red eyes slide briefly to him. “The moment a water wielding Siren reaches him Schlatt is going to be in a hurry to act-“

“Which means he’s more likely to make a mistake,” Tommy finishes with a huff. “What if he doesn’t do anything at all then?”

“Then we’ve got him worked up, gotten our hands on Number Seven, and hopefully something on the second power suppressor.” Techno’s voice is wry. “Schlatt is a clever guy, wouldn’t have gotten into the position he’s in if he wasn’t, but he’s always been impatient.”

“Tell me about it,” Tommy breathes, rubbing a hand against the back of his neck. “It’s all a gamble then?”

“You’re telling me Hero work is much different?”

Tommy snorts at that. “Point,” he allows.

“Would you have done anything different?”

Tommy nearly misses a step, blinking up at the Villain in surprise.

“Dunno,” he admits after a long moment. “I am not exactly up to date on what’s going on.” He thinks it over, mouth twisting thoughtfully behind his mask. “I doubt waiting for the last possible minute is any good though, that’s when he’ll be the most up at arms.”

“He has a persona to uphold to the public,” Techno says, cloak swishing at his ankles and crown jutting with a gleam on his head, every step a regal Villain. “He issued a public challenge, he knows the Syndicate won’t give itself up, that’s just a cover for what he really wants.” A glance. “He wants you and your power, that’s what he’s gambling on.”

“I’m aware,” Tommy mutters, meeting those red eyes with a pounding of his heart. “Are you going to give him what he wants?”

“You and I both know I’d sooner see you dead.” Techno’s lips curl up and Tommy has to appreciate the bluntness for what it is. “You saved Siren’s life, I owe you for that, but there’s only so far even favours extend in this business.”

“Yeah,” Tommy agrees with a twist of his heart. “I know.”

“I house no ill-will towards you, Theseus.” Techno slows his steps, Tommy ending up on his right instead of a step behind which makes his chest flutter funnily. “For now, we are allies.”

“Allies,” Tommy repeats the word slowly.

“Can I count on you to have my back?” Techno lowers his head, red eyes burning into his.

“Can I count on you to have mine?” Tommy challenges right back, squaring his shoulders. “You’re not exactly giving me much to put my trust in.”

Techno laughs, the noise startling in the way it rings out.

“There you are,” Techno’s voice is heavy with dark approval. “I was starting to wonder where your gutsiness had gone.”

“I was tortured and you’ve made if fucking clear my life means shit,” Tommy snaps defensively. “I’m doing my best under the fucking circumstances, *Blade*.”

“Most people, when told their life are expendable, wouldn’t just be fine with it,” Techno rumbles back, his tail flicking with a pink tuft at the very end. “Is that what Dream taught you? That if it’s for the *better good* you dying is an acceptable outcome?”

“No!” Fury flares up. “He never- of course he didn’t fucking tell me that!”

“No?” Techno raises a brow at him behind the pink boar mask. “So why are you so eager to throw your life away then, little Hero?”

“Don’t call me that,” Tommy bites out, bristling. “And I’m fucking *not*. I’m just-“ He falters, mouth twisting. “It’s- I’m not-“ He struggles for the words, head lowering to glower at the ground. “It makes sense.”

“Uh-huh,” Techno says wryly. “I guess the self-sacrificial part comes with the Hero gig then?”

“We’re meant- we’re meant to be expendable,” Tommy forces out. “That’s the *point*, to protect people even if it means our death.”

To protect *Dream*.

“Seems pointless,” Techno says with a moment of consideration. “What a boring and wasteful way to live.”

“*You’re* pointless,” Tommy snaps back grumpily.

“That doesn’t even make any *sense*.”

“It does too.” Tommy’s hands curls at his side. “I’m not- I’m not fucking *eager* to die, I’ve got shit I want to do, but- I’m not exactly- I don’t want to belong to *Schlatt* of all fucking people either! And I don’t know what the *hell* he’s planning. He has- he has to have *something*. He planned for this and I’m-“ He falters, words dying on his tongue, tasting of ash. “We were fucking *careful* about my powers as well and now it’s just-“ He gestures emptily, frustration knotting tight in his chest. “I want- I *chose* Dream. It meant something.”

It meant *everything*.

“He seemed eager enough to throw you away.”

Techno’s eyes are dark and unreadable when Tommy looks up at him.

“And what if he was trying to protect me?” Tommy voices what he hadn’t dared to believe, hadn’t dared to *hope*, but there all the same, tasting of acid on his tongue. “What if- what if all of this is *my fault*-?”

He regrets the words almost immediately, cheeks burning red with shame as he ducks his head.

“I’m not saying Siren should have died that night,” he mutters, fingers twitching. “I’m just-“

He can’t find the words to finish, staring hollowly down at Siren’s- at *Wilbur’s* boots.

“Dream- he knows I wouldn’t just leave him.” The words feels childish, empty. “He has to have known.”

“I can’t speak for him,” Techno says after a long moment. “But to me, loyalty isn’t a one-sided thing. It’s more than just an act of service. It’s putting your trust in someone and knowing that they trust you equally back.”

“He trusted me more than anyone else,” Tommy says with a curling of his lips.

“But was it enough?” Techno challenges.

It’s more than anyone else have ever given me, Tommy thinks but he can’t get himself to say the words.

There’d always been a distance between him and Dream, things he isn’t told, and it became all too clear the night he protected Siren.

“What, exactly, has L’Manberg given you, Theseus?” Techno halts, turning with a whirl of his red coat as Tommy takes a weighed step back.

The Pit is strangely quiet around them and Tommy feels small where he stands.

“Nothing,” he admits a bit dully.

“But you still protect it?” Techno’s gaze measures him, *judges him*, and Tommy draws his shoulders up defensively.

“Because there’s-“ He draws a harsh breath. “Just because it gave me *shit* doesn’t mean I’m going to give up on it! Dream- *Dream* believed it could be better and I wanted-“ He clenches his jaw. “*I want to believe that as well.*”

“But you don’t.”

Tommy flinches.

“It’s- a work in progress,” he says, the joke falling flat between them.

“I warned you once, didn’t I? What happens to Heroes.”

“Is that why you keep calling me Theseus?” Tommy’s mouth twists without humour. “As a warning?”

“He slayed the minotaur, he saved his people!” Techno takes a step towards him, voice lowering with a rumble. “And they *still betrayed him*.”

He stares at himself, reflected in the dull glow of red eyes.

“At least,” he says emptily. “He died for something he believed in.”

“And you’re fine with that?” Techno scoffs, stepping back. “The thing about this world is that there’s only one universal language and that’s *violence*.” The Villain raises his head.

“Believing will only get you so far, words they don’t matter when the in charge in the government won’t *listen*.”

Dangerdangerdanger, Tommy’s instincts whispers, tail tightening around his waist.

“It’s nothing but idealistic dreams you’re clinging to like a *child*,” Techno snorts, the truth an ugly thing that *hurts*.

“Then what would you have me do!?” Tommy snarls back, voice breaking with the frustration that burns hot through him.

“You tried Dream’s way, did you not?” Techno’s mouth curls jagged and sharp. “You’re not a Hero anymore, not as far as L’Manberg is concerned. You’re an enemy of the government, of the very city you’re trying to protect.”

“What about it?” Tommy asks warily.

“What you’ve been doing until now- it obviously hasn’t been working. L’Manberg is the same as it’s ever been! And Dream isn’t even the Number One Hero anymore, is he? Only in name. He’s wrapped prettily around Schlatt’s thumb and *you*- you were thrown to the wolves. Don’t you see what’s happening here?”

Techno’s words are a damning thing and Tommy stumbles back, the Villain following, steps heavy as Tommy’s back collides with bricks, no way to escape.

“You’ve already *lost*, Theseus.” Techno’s palm slaps against the wall beside him, trapping him, face lowering to catch his eyes. “You lost the moment Dream stopped trusting you.” The man’s mouth curls, tusks large and dangerous in his snarl. “Whatever dreams you two had they’re all gone and the sooner you accept it, the better.”

“Why do you even *care*?” Tommy’s voice breaks, fingers scraping against the bricks of the building behind him.

“Because I want you on my side, Theseus.” Techno’s voice is a dark rumble that wraps around his very heart. “You’re more than what Dream made you out to be.”

“I’m not-“

“*You are.*” Red eyes, so different from the green that had been his world.

Tommy’s heart pounds wet inside his chest and he feels like he’s balancing on the edge of a cliff.

“We can still change L’Manberg for the better.” It feels like a promise, words he shouldn’t trust with the lowering of Techno’s voice. “We can make them *listen.*”

“How?” he breathes.

“We work together.” Techno rumbles. “*Truly* work together. None of this- half-assed business and dancing around each other that we’ve been doing. I want you to work with me like you worked with Dream, to follow me like you followed him.”

His heart pounds inside his chest.

“Red Chaos was never meant to stand on his own, was he?” Tommy flinches, nails scraping against rough bricks and he feels bare where he stands, the Villain looming over him, casting his shadow. “Be honest with yourself, what do you have to lose? You’ve already lost everything, haven’t you?”

He feels like he’s drowning.

Red eyes searches his before Techno slowly draws back and Tommy sucks a sharp breath, chest lowering and expanding hard where he stands.

“It can only go up from here, Theseus,” Techno murmurs, mouth curling up with a flare of his cloak as he turns around. “Think about it.”

-

Tommy drags both palms over his face, struggling against the urge to laugh, to *scream*, because *what the fuck*.

“*What do you have to lose?*”

He draws a shuddering breath, raising his head to the posted of Red Chaos with Dream’s smile in green on the back of the red fabric.

“*You’ve already lost everything, haven’t you?*”

The dark scrawl of *TRAITOR*.

He drops his hands at his side, the silence heavy around him, the streets empty.

Tommy stands there for a long moment, hands curling and uncurling at his side before he pushes away, hurrying to catch up and fall in at the man's side with an acknowledging glance from red eyes.

"I'll think about it," he mutters in a low voice. "I'm not- I'm not giving up on Dream but I'll..." He draws a sharp breath. "I'll think about it."

He stares stubbornly in front of him, eyes on the approaching tower, and nearly misses a step when a hand lands on top of his head, scuffing beanie and hair with a rough tousle.

"Don't think too hard." Techno advises him with a grin that Tommy scowls at, pushing his hand away with a grumpy growl. "Business first?"

Tommy snorts, shoulders lowering.

"Business first." Anticipation and dark ugly anger threads through him. "You better keep me from murdering the fucker because I make no promises on behaving, *Blade*."

Techno's laughter rings out, rich and approving, and Tommy struggles against the bloom of warmth inside of him with a ducking of his head and a small curl of his lips behind Siren's mask.

Chapter End Notes

On a small note, if you missed if there's a deleted soft crimeboys scene on my twitter and in the discord server for those of you who are missing them :3

That said- welcome back to another chapter of Hush Now! I originally meant for the Bad conversation to happen this chapter but I was at 6k when I ended this one because Techno... had a lot to say...

Who am I to interrupt the dude?

It's almost 3 am but the chapter is done and I'm pretty pleased. Dialogue was lowkey murdering me but I think I got it into what I wanted so, poggers on that.

Hope you're having a good one wherever you are out there :)

-

If you're interested there's a [Hush Now Discord](#) that tends to go *brrrrr* with the theories in designated channels and also have a lot of fun chatter and chill people on top of scoops of chaos with my lovely mods<3

You can find me on **tumblr** here: [corpse-art](#)
And I'm also on **twitter** now here: [corpsey_art](#)

I post a one hour countdown on all my social medias for a new chapter update if you're interested in such a thing :)

-

DUDES. We have new Hush Now art!! They're all amazing. Go and give them all so much love<3

(And if I ever miss linking your art- pls let me know!! I try to make sure I keep track of everything but I am but human)

[L'Manberg by Flying_Solo143](#) art

[Them by PlantChecker](#) art

[Soft by PlantChecker](#) art

[FANART MASTERPOST](#)

Chapter 42

Chapter Notes

Someone requested an overview of the known secret identities so I'll fill this out properly at a later date and then post with each chapter:

Tommy - Red Chaos

Heroes:

Dream - Dream

404 - George

Valorant - Sapnap

Royal - Eret

Rose - Hannah

Schlatt - Schlatt (formerly Judge)

Villains:

Angel of Death - Phil

Blood God - Techno

Siren - Wilbur

Warden - Sam

Lethe - Ranboo

Judge - Tubbo

Jester - Quackity

Nemesis - Niki

Eris - Eret

Vigilantes:

Faux Pas - Fundy

Chronos - Karl

Kitten - TinaKitten

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The room is dark, a single bulb dangling above in the ceiling, but Tommy's eyes locks on glowing white eyes and his mouth twists in a snarl behind his mask.

“Bad,” he growls. “Fancy seeing you here.”

Techno is just a step behind him and there's a strange sort of comfort in knowing that he's not alone this time, that- Techno *needs* him, wouldn't allow another power suppressor to be put on him because it directly go against the Syndicates plans.

The bar is on the fucking *floor* but hell, Tommy will take whatever he can at this point.

“Who is he?” Bad’s voice rings tense, eyes on Techno who folds his arms, mouth curled up in a grin. “I told you-“

“Don’t you recognize me?” Tommy interrupts. “I know it’s been some two months since we last saw each other *Bad* but to completely forget about me? I’m *hurt*.” He reaches for his mask, tugging it down just enough to reveal his face for a flash of a second and-

Bad straightens in his seat, thin rope like tail with an arrow at the end flicking in surprise at the chair leg.

“T-“

“*Hero names*, Bad,” Tommy interrupts with a growl, his voice ringing gritty through the rise of the voice changer. “Or are you going to take more from me?” he challenges, the hostility twisting ugly through him. “My powers weren’t enough for you already?”

Bad eyes are wide, the brightness climbing before dying down with a blink, black lips twisting with a small peak of a needle-sharp fang.

“So you really are back.”

“I am,” Tommy growls, tail unwinding from his midriff with a flick that makes Bad stiffen, gaze on the blond tuft that Tommy waggles with a growing grin. “Look at us, we practically match now.”

“What did you do?” Bad asks tensely, gaze snapping to Techno. “What-“

Tommy takes a step forward, and then another, palms slamming against the table with a rattle, nails scraping against the wood as he leant forward, looming, a shift of steps behind him distantly alerting him to the fact that Techno was still there.

Not alone, not alone, not alone.

He clings to it with the fear that beads sweat at the back of his neck as he stares at the demon who had taken *so fucking much* from him.

“*Eyes on me, Bad*,” he snarls and there’s something unfathomable in those strange ancient eyes that regards him, attention fully on him and not veering away. “He did nothing to me, this is all on *you*.” The mark glows warm around his wrist in an echo of the power dampener. “What happened to not involving yourself in human business, huh?” He lowers his head. “Was I the *exception* to your little rules?”

“It’s not so simple,” Bad says after a long moment, easing back with a tap of his claws. “It was for your safety-“

“Oh was it now?” His voice crawls honey thick out of his mouth, the nails on his right hand tearing through the glove and gouging into the table. “Because I sure as *fuck* didn’t *feel* safe when I spent two weeks *powerless* in the hands of the Warden, unable to do *shit* as he broke my bones over and over and over again-!”

The terror and helplessness of those weeks still rattles through him, no matter how he struggles against it, his chest heaving as he glowers into the white eyes of the demon who lowers his head with a cast of shadow of his hood.

“You’ve changed,” Bad says finally and it tastes like damnation.

“Oh have I now?” Tommy snaps with a snarl as he pushes up. “What gave it away? The tail? The *fucking* tusks-?”

“*Language.*”

Tommy’s mouth clicks shut and only the hand that snags the back of his collar keeps him from lurching forward, the sound that tears out of his mouth inhuman as he’s pulled back, an arm circling around him, pinning him tight against a firm chest.

The warmth bleeds through his skin, breath sucked punched out of his chest as another arm draws around him, a chin pressing against the top of his head where he stands, eyes too wide and trembling, fracturing at the seams as he’s fucking *hugged*.

It’s different from the way Wilbur had folded around him, tucking him against his chest, the scent of nicotine and sandalwood filling his nose.

And yet- it’s not so very different at all in the way it keeps him from breaking.

He stands, chest heaving, mouth parted behind his mask, in the arms of the Blood God, and he stares at Bad who is standing up, having shoved away from the table, half-blended into the shadows with eyes startlingly wide and glowing.

“Easy now,” Techno murmurs with air that ghosts warm against his neck as Tommy wrestles to claw the pieces of himself together. “*Easy.*”

“I had-“ His voice comes out strangely numb, a ringing in his ear and fingers curling self-consciously. “*I cut off my arm, Bad.*”

A small twitch of the demon’s shoulder, not a flinch but near enough.

Words he cannot say, not here, lingers on his tongue.

If it wasn’t for you, they whisper. Dream could never have left me behind.

If it wasn’t for you, they whisper. Wilbur would never have been taken that night.

If it wasn’t for you-

If it wasn’t for you-

If it wasn’t for you-

The words pounds through his head, emotion tangling so tight in his chest it hurts to feel his lungs expand.

“You could at least- you could have fucking- *talked to me*. Something. Fucking *anything*,” Tommy presses on, his tail curling around Techno’s leg in a desperate attempt to ground himself. “You left me all alone without anywhere to turn and no *fucking idea* of what was going on.”

He draws a harsh trembling breath, the tip of his tail flicking and lips quivering before he bites down hard on the inside of his cheek.

“You- you owe me some goddamn answers, Bad,” he grits out. “You had no fucking *right* to take my powers away from me. To take- to take something that was *intricately mine*.”

A low rumble that tastes like approval from the Villain holding him makes his shoulders stiffen and-

I’m not alone.

It’s a foolish sentiment, he knows it is, but beyond rationality there’s a desperate aching void inside of him that craves it, that wants to push deeper into the arms holding him, to have someone fill the role Dream had taken in his life.

Mentor. Friend. Brother. A complicated mess of words never spoken out loud between them.

Bad slowly sinks back in his chair again with a low sigh.

“You were supposed to stay out of things,” the demon tells him and Tommy’s mouth curls. “That was the whole point of the power suppressor.” Glowing white eyes that seeks his. “Dream- he wanted you safe. That’s the only reason I agreed to it.”

“When have you ever known me to stay out of things?” Tommy demands, voice cracking painfully on the words.

“And that’s exactly why,” Bad’s voice is wry, a touch of humour that falls flat between them. “You’ve always been unfalteringly loyal. It’s both your biggest strength but also your biggest weakness.”

The arms around him tightens with the rippling tension running through his shoulders and Tommy swallows thickly, wrestling against the hostility because he needs answers more than he needs to tear Bad in two.

“Are you sure you want to have this conversation now?” Bad asks finally, flicking a look over his shoulders.

“His brother is missing because of *you*,” Tommy bites out sharply.

Bad’s gaze lingers with something unreadable on him, long enough that Tommy feels a stirring of hesitation, tail curling tighter around the Villain’s leg and fingers twitching.

“If you’re sure,” Bad agrees finally before Tommy can go back on his words. “Dream was being monitored even back then, had been for months, both of you.” Bad leans forward, weaving his fingers together in front of him as Tommy stares at him. “Schlatt got his hands

on your pills, worked out what your powers were, how they worked, and confronted Dream about them.”

Bad’s tail flicks, looking tired where he sits.

“Dream figured things out quickly- that Schlatt was planning on using your loyalty to him to use Siren’s power through the use of yours. It was a decision between your life and Siren’s and he made a desperate choice.” A sigh. “He didn’t count on your interference but he saw an opportunity in it- a chance to get you far away from Schlatt and to give himself time to solve things with your safely hidden away.”

Something horrible twists in Tommy’s chest and he tastes blood with the tearing of his teeth through the soft flesh of his cheek.

“He knew that Schlatt didn’t know your civilian identity. As long as Red Chaos remained out of the papers you were safe. Powerless, yes, but *safe*. There would be nothing tying you to the Hero Red Chaos.” Bad lowers his head. “He knew that the power suppressor could not be removed but I believe that he saw an opportunity to give you a normal life, away from everything that had to do with Heroes.”

“Even I know that’s a foolish sentiment,” Techno snorts, the low rumble of his voice registering only distance in the tumbling of his mind. “We don’t just *stop*. The lives we live becomes part of us.”

“Is it not natural to stop?” Bad wonders. “If given no other choice?”

“For some of us that’s the same as death.” There’s a warning growl in Techno’s voice, almost protective, and Tommy sucks a small breath.

“My son has disapproved more than once for the decision we made so I can only assume there’s truth to it.” A small needle sharp fang peaks at the pull of Bad’s lips. “I do not pretend to understand human sentiment. I am not human. There’s a reason I chose to distance myself.”

“Why-“ Tommy’s voice comes out small. “Why is he still listening to Schlatt if... if I was gone and-“

His thoughts feels jumbled, disjointed, tangling on his tongue where he stands.

For the first time Bad hesitates, the brightness of his eyes dimming.

“Schlatt has something on Dream, I don’t know what it is, and he’s so heavily monitored that it’s impossible for even me to get to him without involving myself further.” Bad’s fingers clenches. “I cannot, will not, involve myself more. I have a responsibility here and I’ve already made too many exceptions.” A beat. “None which has served you well, it would appear.”

“You’re not going to help?” Bad won’t meet his eyes and it feels like Tommy’s world is crumbling beneath his feet, the only thing keeping him up the arms still wrapped around him.

“You- you really aren’t going to fucking help after *everything*, ” his voice cracks with disbelief and there’s a roar in his ears.

He doesn’t care.

You don’t matter.

You’re not the priority.

And Tommy fucking *knows* but for a moment he had *hoped* because-

“Dream- he fucking *needs* you and you’re just gonna leave him to- to whatever the *fuck* Schlatt has on him!?” He jerks in Techno’s hold but the Villain is still holding him tight and he’s both thankful and fucking *furious* about it as a sound rumbles deep from the depth of his being, ugly and tasting acidic with wrath. “*He trusted you!*”

“I have always made the limits of my involvement clear,” Bad’s voice is a coiling of warning tension, eyes refusing to look up. “Dream knows and understands-“

“*Fuck you!*” Tommy interrupts, teeth baring beneath his mask. “You won’t fucking help him and you- you denied me the ability to. If Dream- if something happens to him it’s on *your* head.”

The silence stretches between them, Tommy’s ragged breaths loud in it.

“If blaming me helps you feel better-“

“Oh fucking shove it.” He presses back into Techno’s hold, the disgust rolling thickly through him as he stares with disbelief at the demon. “If you won’t help you can at least tell me who else your *involvement* has already hurt. You owe me at least *that*.”

“Dream wanted you out of things.” Bad’s gaze drifts over his shoulder, to the towering form of Techno.

“I don’t care what Dream wants right now because he’s a *dumbass* and he’s in way over his head.” Tommy tugs roughly at his shoulder until Techno obliges, letting him go, and he takes a hard step forward. “He *needs me*, Bad. If you’re so damn concerned about the cost of your involvement *this* is your damn chance to fix them.”

He tears the glove from his hand, yanking the hem of the sleeves up and slamming his palm down in all its pink, black nailed glory.

Bad stares at it, gaze unfathomable.

“How much more are you going to let your mistakes cost me?” Tommy’s mouth twists ugly with his snarl. “Because I’ll pay it until I’m *dead* if it means I get Dream back.”

If it means I get Wilbur back, he thinks, heart heavy with unspoken words.

“Either you help me,” Tommy lowers his voice, leaning closer to the demon, “or I go in on my own, blind, I don’t care, I’m *done* sitting on the sidelines.”

“Is that why you’re with him?” Bad asks with a flick of his tail.

“You don’t get to judge me for *shit*. ” Tommy’s mouth twists. “Besides, he’s been far more useful than *you* have.”

It’s not a lie exactly and yet it sits odd on his tongue because-

It’s not because he *cares* that Techno takes him out of the cell, it’s only for his *usefulness* but-

“Thanks,” Techno’s voice comes deadpan behind him and-

A twitch of his lips, hidden behind his mask, but caught he realises when he meets Bad’s gaze far too close.

He sees the way the demon’s chest rises and falls, remembers the fond ruffles of his hair, the candy slipped sweet and tasting of strawberries.

He’s close enough to reach out, a part of him wanting nothing more than to crowd close to the demon, to demand some sort of reassurance, but it drowns in the ache of betrayal and fury that rots deep in his heart.

Close enough to reach out.

And yet, the distance has never felt further between them.

It *hurts*.

“You were just a child when I met you,” Bad says in a low voice, emotions impossible to hide. “You’ve grown up.”

“Funny, humans tend to do that.” Tommy draws back, suddenly wanting to be nowhere near the demon with an itch beneath his skin as he takes a step back demonstratively, not close enough to touch but near enough to feel the heat that radiates off the piglin’s skin behind him as he folds his arms. “Why is there a second power dampener, Bad. And who did you give it to?”

Bad spreads his palms down on the table, the claw of his index finger tapping against the wood before stilling with a low breath.

“Do you understand the price of your choices?”

“Do *you*?” Tommy challenges bitterly.

Bad leans back, claws scraping against the wood with a tilt of his head. “I made the Pit, didn’t I?”

Tommy’s tail flicks.

“I was making my guesses,” he allows, unsure about the direction of the conversation.
“There’s only so many old demons around.”

“The Pit is built on a graveyard.” There’s heavy drapes covering the window beside Bad and he reaches out, drawing them aside, red light casting its glow on the table. “It was never meant to be anything but a tomb following the destruction wrought here.”

“What changed?” Techno asks, not sounding interested at all, and Tommy chokes quietly on a surprised snort.

“It would be more accurate to ask what *didn’t* change.” Bad stares out the window, head tilted up towards the tower, and the diamond man caught in the web of it. “Human nature remains forever unchanged in the tides of time.” Heat prickles at Tommy’s skin, not from behind him but from in front of him. “Selfish, destructive, *cruel*-“

The white glow in Bad’s eyes dulls, red crawling like a spider web from the edges, the shadows flickering around them, darkening, the air growing thick and heavy with the breath Tommy sucks into his lungs.

“You humans never change.”

Techno’s hand lands on his shoulder, fingers digging into his skin, but Tommy doesn’t move, staring at the demon who is curling his shoulders inwards, looking small where he sits, alone on a wooden chair in a dark room.

“Theseu-“

“*Dream*- he fought for change,” he wrestles out, interrupting Techno, knuckles pressing tight against his skin with the bunching of his fists. “*All his life* he’s fought to change and make something better of this world, of *himself*.” The shadows flutters, stretching, darkening the room, but Tommy doesn’t budge. “He’s doing far more for change than you ever will!”

The shadows circles around his feet, rising around them in a yawning void, the wood creaking beneath Techno’s shift of feet, one hand grasped tight around the handle of his axe.

“You don’t get to talk to me about *change* when you’re the same as you’ve ever been, stuck in the past and refusing to do *shit*!” Tommy snarls and the shadows still, quivering in place as Bad raises his head, the red glowing eerily in his eyes.

“At least we’re *trying*,” Tommy heaves out. “You- I know fuck all about you but- you meant the Pit to be your own tomb, didn’t you?” He laughs, ugly and loud in the bark of it. “But you’re stuck here with us, still alive, pretending you’re so much better when you’re hiding away like a *coward*.”

Bad’s mouth twists and for a moment something unfathomable and old, ancient with heavy grief rests heavy on him with the gaze of the demon before Bad pushes up and Tommy takes an automatic step back, shoulders colliding with Techno’s chest.

“I made the Pit to preserve the memory of someone dear to me and I allowed it to become a place of refuge for those turned away from society above because that’s what Skeppy would have wanted.” A step towards him. “I have made more allowances for you humans than you’ll ever fathom and I’ve paid more than my due.”

Tommy curls his hands tight at his sides and Bad’s eyes meets his and Tommy knows there’s no salvaging what had been between them.

And in the midst of the anger, buried deep beneath it, squirming like worms in his gut, is regret.

“It’s Siren who wears the second power suppressor.” The demon steps past them, tail flicking. “But before that, *before I made yours*, there was the original bracelet.”

Tommy feels his blood turn to ice, the world slowing into a slow crawl with a too slow twist on the balls of his feet.

“I made that one for Dream,” Bad admits to them both, voice quiet.

If it wasn’t for you-

He lurches out, hand reaching for the demon, but shadows are already swallowing him up, Tommy’s fingers closing in air with a furious snarl.

The silence stretches as Tommy hunches his shoulders, drawing a harsh breath before dropping down on the floor with a loud *thump*.

“Asshole,” he grits out, heart aching, scrubbing both hands over his face roughly before mashing the ends of his palms into his eyes with a shiver. “Old ass barbecue *piece of shit demon-*”

A weight lowers down beside him and Tommy clenches his jaw, smothering the words clawing up his throat with air that slips through his teeth with a rough exhale.

“Well, that could have gone better,” Techno comments. “And worse.”

Tommy snorts tiredly.

“How could it have gone worse?” he asks, dropping his palms and peering up at the Villain who has made himself comfortable beside him, leaning back on broad palms.

“Well, we know there’s three bracelets now.”

“Two,” Tommy corrects.

“*Three*. One has been deactivated.” Techno considers him. “What are your thoughts on what he said?”

“Which part?” Tommy wonders, tone rough and wry as he drops his palms back in a copy of the other. “He basically confirmed what we were already suspecting, decided he’d be no help,

and cryptically dropped some third bracelet bullshit on us.” He frowns. “He didn’t say the third one was anything like the other two.”

“I noticed that as well,” Techno’s mouth curls with approval that, despite everything, makes Tommy’s shoulders lower just an inch. “Could be anything then.”

“Yeah.” Tommy blinks, feeling strangely empty where he sits. “He’s a cryptic dickhead.” His mouth curls. “*Language*, my ass. Fucking rock for brains-“

“How did you meet him?” Techno interrupts, a gleam of amusement in his eyes that relaxes his face, looking less like the infamous Blood God and more like Wilbur’s brother Techno in that moment.

Tommy knows it’s a dangerous thing to make such a distinction but he’s too tired to care.

“Dream introduced him to me,” he huffs. “Dunno where he met the fucker but- I’ve known him since we were both kids.”

Techno hums. “Seems like he didn’t much of a good job looking after you two.”

“*You don’t say*,” Tommy says flatly. “He’s always been distant but- I thought he cared about Dream at least.”

“Not you?” Techno raises a brow. “He was quite insistent on seeing you.”

“Yeah, because I’m not sitting around doing nothing like a good little dog.” Tommy’s palm slides across the ground until he collapses flat on his back, staring up at the ceiling, arms stretched out over his head. “That razor you borrowed me-“ Tommy hesitates but. “Dream had the exact one, only with a *D* instead of a *T*.”

Just like the scratchy little *T* he’d made on his own.

Techno shifts and from the corner of his eye Tommy sees the Villain staring down at him.

“You- you two were in the program together, weren’t you?”

“He doesn’t know,” Techno admits after a long moment. “And I’d prefer it stayed that way.”

“Why?” Tommy turns his head. “He cared about you.”

Both of Techno’s brows shoots up, a low *huh* leaving him. “That’s news to me.”

Tommy stares at him.

“The fuck you *mean* it’s news to you?”

“We weren’t exactly *friends*, if you catch my drift.” Something strange shadows in Techno’s eyes. “*Rivals* would have been a more accurate description.”

“*I didn’t want to do it, I didn’t want to do it- you have to believe me, Tommy, you have to-*“

“HE BETRAYED ME!”

“I trusted him-“

“I thought-“

“I should have known better, he always told me-“

“He was my friend- or I thought he was I don’t- I can’t- he left me Tommy, he left me and now all I have is you-“

“Maybe I was the fool all along, for thinking he actually cared about me but I just wanted-“

“Please, I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry-“

“It’s all my fault.”

Something wretched, something broken, the loss of something Dream struggles to grasp at.

“Oh.” Tommy says quietly.

Techno regards him and then to Tommy’s surprise the Villain shifts, stretching out on his back beside him, arm close enough to brush his ribs as hands fold together on the Villain’s chest.

“We were *discouraged* from having friends in the program,” Techno says, the rumble of his voice a strangely comforting thing, his tail flicking with a small thump against the floor near Tommy’s knee, his own twitching in response. “It’s not *wrong* to call it a program of child soldiers because that’s what we were being made into.”

There’s distaste, a low growl that wraps around his heart with a squeeze as he blinks up at the ceiling.

“We were constantly pitted against each other and those that did good got privileges that kept us pushing to out do each other and the the punishments dealt to those that failed were... harsh.” A huff. “Dream was their golden boy, loyal and clever and *not* a hybrid. He went out of his way to sneak me food and keep me company when I got locked up in one of the isolation cells so I can’t say I hated the guy.”

Tommy supposes... he understands, on some level. Dream had seen kinship in Techno and Techno...

Hadn’t.

Clearly.

“I should have known better, he always told me-“

Tommy’s chest expands, air held before being blown out in a harsh exhale.

“I’m sorry,” he says. “I- Dream wanted the program shut down but... we’ve been shit at handling it, I guess.”

Techno snorts. “You have.”

“Yeah.”

“Uh-huh.”

“Shut up-” Tommy throws an arm out, freezing as his elbow collided and jerking it back, panic twisting white hot through him. “I-“

A hand flattens down over his face, catching him mid-motion of lurching up.

“Chill out,” Techno huffs, pushing him down, leaving Tommy staring up at pink fingers donned in gold.

His own ring rests warm against his skin, beside the feather, beneath his shirt, right over his heart.

Slowly he forces himself to relax his muscles, slumping boneless against the floor.

He puffs a breath into the mask as Techno’s hand drags up, giving a tug of one of the brown curls sticking out from his beanie before sliding it back to rest on his own chest.

“You really do look like him,” Techno breathes a harsh noise and guilt curls deep and wretched in Tommy’s chest.

“I-I’m at least ten percent more handsome,” he gets out, lip trembling beneath his mask before he bites down on it.

“Ten percent.”

“We can’t all be pretty bastards like you.”

Techno’s laugh is loud and sudden and Tommy, a bit broken and struggling, finds himself caught in it, wheezing on something that threatens to turn into a sob where he lies beside Wilbur’s brother, shoulders shaking on the dusty floor of the shitty ass apartment where Bad had left them.

Chapter End Notes

You know how I like to complain about dialogue? This is me complaining about dialogue. This chapter has been at my throat for ages as I wrestled with it. And this is me officially wiping my hands off it.

So many pages of back and forth. I weep. But finally getting to that end scene...

All worth it.

Don't have much else to say. Summer is here, I leave to work busily for two weeks soon so gonna be swamped for a bit, but knowing me I'll be writing anyway on my trusty laptop.

Hope you're having a good one, wherever you are out there<3

-

If you're interested there's a [Hush Now Discord](#) that tends to go *brrrr* with the theories in designated channels and also have a lot of fun chatter and chill people on top of scoops of chaos with my lovely mods<3

You can find me on **tumblr** here: [corpse-art](#)
And I'm also on **twitter** now here: [corpsey_art](#)

I post a one hour countdown on all my social medias for a new chapter update if you're interested in such a thing :)

-

DUDES. We have new Hush Now art!! They're all amazing. Go and give them all so much love<3

(And if I ever miss linking your art- pls let me know!! I try to make sure I keep track of everything but I am but human)

[Alleyway Encounter by RatKing302](#) art

[Swaddled and Stitched Together by SquirrelViolent](#) art

[Goopy Boy by raccoonwithacoffeecup](#) art

[FANART MASTERPOST](#)

Chapter 43

Chapter Notes

Someone requested an overview of the known secret identities so I'll fill this out properly at a later date and then post with each chapter:

Tommy - Red Chaos

Heroes:

Dream - Dream

404 - George

Valorant - Sapnap

Royal - Eret

Rose - Hannah

Schlatt - Schlatt (formerly Judge)

Villains:

Angel of Death - Phil

Blood God - Techno

Siren - Wilbur

Warden - Sam

Lethe - Ranboo

Judge - Tubbo

Jester - Quackity

Nemesis - Niki

Eris - Eret

Vigilantes:

Faux Pas - Fundy

Chronos - Karl

Kitten - TinaKitten

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy rolls his neck, shoulder aching from the stretch and pull where tusks had torn into him, the sides of his neck aching where gills had grown and rotted.

His fingers ghost up them, brushing at the bandages Techno had secured in place, mouth twisting behind the mask on his face as he lowers his hand down.

He stares out over the streets of the Pit, at the piglin hybrid's side, something aching strangely inside of him as he peers up at the older.

Techno's red eyes drift down to him, looking out from the pink mask of a hog, the raise of his brow barely visible.

Tommy's brain is blank, emotionally exhausted, aching for nothing more than to close his eyes and take a long nap.

He knows that there's no time for it.

"This place- it's not quite what I expected it to be," he hears himself saying, a note of wryness creeping into his voice to disguise the tiredness. "The way people speak about the Pit- I kinda envisioned-" He waves a hand. "You know, there's all this talk about the fighting rings and shit."

Techno is tall, the red light above him catching in the shine of the jutting golden crown, and Tommy wonders if he's imagining it or if the Villain has gotten even taller, even broader, the white shirt straining against heavy muscles as arms folds over a broad chest.

More piglin than human, so different from the charade he had put up when they met at Wilbur's house, all slim limbs and delicate pink strands framing a sharp jaw.

And yet- it's not so different at all, in the way he moves, easy familiar motions in another shape.

He remembers the warmth of Techno's hand over his, the coarse pelt of Carl, the large creature shifting on heavy hooves, warm breath misting in the morning cold and-

Fuck.

He's tired.

There's too much happening, everything crumbling in his bare hands, slipping through his fingers like sand he struggles to hold onto and-

Dream.

Wilbur.

Sapnap.

Bad.

Fucking *Gogy* who decided to oh so conveniently disappear and-

"Would you like to see it?"

Tommy blinks, taking a moment to remember his question, brain scrambling tiredly and *fucking hell.*

"s not exactly the time for it, is it?" he says when it clicks, voice dragging roughly, one hand raising to drag through his hair before he remembers the beanie on his head and presses his

palm flat against his neck, grounding his palm into the tense muscles there. “Schlatt-“

“You’re swaying on your feet, Theseus.”

Again with the nickname, Tommy thinks, but- it doesn’t annoy him as much as it should and he huffs.

“I’m fin-“

“Schlatt won’t be making any hasty decisions, he’ll be calculating his next move carefully.”

Techno rolls his shoulders, the heavy axe looking almost small where it rests on his back.

“And Angel will let us know if anything happens at the tower and Eris has McChill. We might as well kill some time.”

The concept feels foreign.

Of course there’d been moments of levity, of jokes and long stretches of boredom during missions but- they’d never gone out of their way to just, *do something* to pass the time.

He shifts, gnawing on the inside of his cheek as he averts his eyes from Techno- staring down the long stretch of the emptied street.

In the distance he can see the ice from McChill melting slowly where it had spiraled up towards the sky in a clash of powers.

His eyes browses past windows with curtains pulled shut, the silence eerie around them.

It makes his fingers twitch, wariness clawing sharp enough that he’s feeling mildly paranoid.

“We shouldn’t-“

“That’s not what I’m asking.” Techno’s mouth curves sharp with the large sharp tusks and his red cloak rustles with the shift of his feet. “Do you *want* to see it?” Red eyes burns into his.

“The *true* nature of the Pit.”

Tommy should say no.

There’s more important things to be done.

Eret is still back with McChill and rumours about a Siren-clad figure with Nemesis powers were sure to have reached the surface. If Schlatt truly knew about his powers it wouldn’t take the Number Two Hero to put one and two together and fucking *do* something about it.

But Techno’s lingers on him, the offering strange, and Tommy hesitates but-

He doesn’t want to go back to McChill, doesn’t want to see Eret who had revealed their identity so easily, a Hero and Villain alike, ensnared in their own complicated web.

“*Because you need someone in your corner*,” Eret had said, blue eyes steady on him. “*And I want to be that person.*”

Tommy doesn't know if he can trust it and-

Tommy knows the cruelty Blood God is capable of, but he also sees the humanity in the soft tug of his hair, in the love for a brother taken away.

"They're human, just like you and me," Dream had remarked in the aftermath of their first run in with Blood God and Nemesis when Tommy had been leaning over him, frowning at the delicate stitches as he carefully smeared it down with gel that was supposed to help with the scarring.

Techno's eyes burns into him, a strong steady force of violence, a man with his own complicated honour.

"I want you to work with me like you worked with Dream, to follow me like you followed him," Techno rumbles, the words heady.

A leader.

Wilbur's brother.

"Red Chaos was never meant to stand on his own, was he?" The words had flayed him bare where he'd stood in the Villain's crowned shadow, red eyes burning into his. *"Be honest with yourself, what do you have to lose? You've already lost everything, haven't you?"*

Tommy has choices to make and danger lurks in every decision he makes, he knows it.

And he doubts it's without reason the offer is being made and Tommy's breath whistles sharp with his inhalation before he lets the air out slowly from his lungs.

"Techno's my brother. I trust him with my life and I trust him with yours." Wilbur's words rings through his head and- *"Give him a chance. You're both more alike than you think."*

"Sure," he says, grinning tiredly behind his mask. "Show me the *real* Pit, Blade."

A snorted huff at the nickname but approval burns hot as the Blood God, famous leader of the Syndicate, bares his teeth and tusks in a fearsome smile meant for him and him only.

-

"They tell us to smile. That it's a reassurance." Dream's mask slots over his face perfectly, settling in place, his hand spanning across it before lowering down to reveal the smile. *"The mask is the best I can do."*

Tommy covers his mouth completely with a metal contraption that opens into a snarl of bared teeth.

It's as much for him as it's for Dream.

Dream snarls more than he smiles and Tommy will wear it proudly on his own mask, ever the faithful dog.

Heroes.

There are no smiles in their ranks, only viciousness and champagne that tastes of rot and decay.

-

It's a dark cave, winding staircases, torches that flickers on walls, fire burning.

He can feel his heart pounding and anticipation buzzing alongside the curiosity as Techno bends down in the middle of a corridor, hand sliding over the fine powdered stone dust before pausing and pushing down.

An invisible square lowers down, a low hiss following as Techno rose up, cloak rustling with his step back, a hand stretching out to stop his automatic step forward, curiosity flooding through him.

The ground opens with a rough scraping sound that makes him wince, one hand slapping over his ear in discomfort, but unwilling to look away as the Pit opens up.

The hatch locks in place with a sudden stretch of silence, leaving nothing but a dark chasm.

There's nothing of significance on the walls, nothing that hints of the corridor hiding this secret, but there it is and Techno's hand lowers down.

"I'll go first," Techno says before Tommy can open his mouth. "It can be tricky to brace yourself the first time." A glance, a wry sort of dark amusement in those red eyes with the curl of his lips. "Wouldn't want to cut off your legs this time."

Before Tommy can muster a response to *that* the Villain drops down and there's a distant thud of heavy boots.

Tommy takes a step forward, then another, peering down into the darkness.

"You sure about this?" he asks the empty air.

He stares down at Siren's boot, the way it rests with just the tip over the open chasm to the Pit and slides it further, weighing it forward.

There's no response. Not like he'd expected one.

He puts his weight forward, boots slipping over the edge, and he drops into the darkness below.

No going back.

There's a swoosh of air, Siren's coat flaring up around him, eyes widening as he falls for longer than he expects, knees already braced instinctively but-

Hands catches beneath his armpits and Tommy's world rushes back to him, the Villain's arms stretched to leave him dangling like a child in the dark as Siren's coat settles behind him.

That fall would have killed me, Tommy thinks with a startled blink as he's let down, sucking in a breath of air as he reaches out to grab onto the Villain's cloak in the darkness, fingers clenching tight.

"That can't be the only way in," he bites out.

"It's the quickest one." The amusement in the Villain's voice is thick enough to taste and Tommy huffs, stepping blindly after the other when he feels the tug of fabric.

"... This place really need to invest in some lights."

-

The world that greets him is cramped, metal oddly patched in places making up the walls and roof the red light from the ground above soon staining the floors and walls and the stench of sweat and blood makes his nose twitch.

There's red brick crowding in contrast to the dark metal, the air heavy with the noise that bounces strangely, voices crowding into a buzz that makes his ears ache.

Stale water that drips into puddles from the ceiling and they pass by an old grimy fountain with the water so dark and overgrown with algae that it's impossible to see the bottom in the shallow depths of it as he glances at it.

He veers closer to Techno, avoiding a group of hooded figures with cloaks brushing their shins, slitted eyes meeting his briefly before they ducked to hurry their steps.

The air is heavy with smog that rise from factory like buildings, a haze that the steam rising from the metal grates that run down the streets, rusted from the water.

Behind the backdrop of iron and sweat and *too many people* there's a strange cloying stench to the whole place- like a sort of wet muggy road.

He resists the urge to peer back, to crane his head around, to angle to catch every detail of the ragged industrial area Techno leads him through with easy comfortable steps, people spilling out of his path to make room in the sweltering heat.

It's busy- *far* busier than it had been above in the dome shaped part of the Pit. Or perhaps it's because it's so cramped, narrow streets and air thick, but another person bumps into him, knocking him aside, foot landing hard on Techno's boots and his cheeks flushes hot in embarrassment behind Siren's mask as he yanks himself back.

"Sorry," he grumbles, hunching his shoulders and levelling a dirty look back at the offender who has already disappeared into the throng of people.

A hand lands on his shoulder, hauling him closer to Techno, and Tommy just avoids slamming into a wall of a person who banes an easy path without bothering to look down.

When he glances up Techno the Villain still has a hand on his shoulder, a look he can't be bothered to understand in those red eyes regarding him.

Even standing still people crowd together to make space for him, leaving a small circle around them.

"Thanks," he forces out, feeling horribly out of his depth where he stands. "I'm--"

"Stay close," the Villain interrupts, leaning down with a lowering of his voice. "This is not a place for little Heroes to get lost."

Tommy grimaces, yanking his shoulder loose. "Yeah, yeah," he mutters, skin prickling from lingering eyes. "Just- get us out of this."

"You're looking a bit *anxious* there." Techno doesn't move an inch, the asshole. "I thought being people person was part of the gig," he drawls.

"I didn't sign up to *talk* with them, just--" A shoulder brushes his back and he flinches, swivelling around with a step back, colliding with the Villain. "Just get us the fuck out of here," he grits out, heart pounding as he glowers with a curling clenching of his fists.

Techno doesn't reply but his hand settles back on his shoulder, Tommy's muscles knotting beneath the warm grip as he's guided in front of the other, nudged into moving with a tense step.

He draws a breath, another, staring down at Siren's boots on the dusty ground, barely avoiding an old dried patch of blood and-

He looks up and his eyes widens as he watches people spill out of his path, making room, hardly daring to look at him as the Blood God guides him forward.

His breath stutters at the look of fear in the eyes that meets his for just a moment before they duck out of his path.

Out of Blood God's path.

Out of *Siren's* path.

"Look less like a petrified cat," Techno murmurs low enough for only him to hear. "They're all watching you."

You don't fucking say, Tommy thinks half-hysterically even as he straightens his shoulders, aiming for the natural swag of Siren with the next step, falling into it like charade as he raises his chin, heart pounding in his chest.

-

It's different from the looks he'd gained as Red Chaos.

A lost little sidekick, so easily discarded, just a faithful dog kicked to the curb.

Fear. Respect. *Admiration.*

His teeth sinks into the inside of his cheek, something strange in his chest, Techno's hand warm on his shoulder, steady and grounding.

He aches for Wilbur.

He aches for Dream.

-

The headlines burnt on the inside of his retina's, sweat dripping down his neck, fog filtered through Siren's mask.

RED CHAOS: HERO OR VILLAIN?

-

Tommy nearly stops but Techno's hand forces him forward even as Manifold looks up from a clipboard to catch on them both- the goggles over his eyes the familiar red and blue shaders that wrap back, connected to an ear piece with microphone, a small red dot glowing on it.

"He hates me," Tommy hisses with faint panic. "Fucker can pick me out in a heartbeat, it's eerie. He'll suspect something!"

A high-collared blue jacket, loose pants tucked into heavy boots, brown hair shorn short and a mask with an electronic smile that warps down at the sight of them.

Manifold had always had a weird fucking vendetta against him- Tommy would rather *not* have anything to do with the fucker.

"You're Siren right now, act like it."

Tommy contemplates elbowing Techno who continues onward unconcerned, giving him no choice but to clench his teeth tight behind the mask and keep his shoulders in the charade of false arrogance.

"Well, well, well- look what the cat dragged in!" Manifold tucks the clipboard down at his side, one arm folding across his chest. "Blood God and the water wielding Siren!" The downward turned smile turns up as Manifold leans forward as they come to a halt in front of him. "You're the new hot topic around here, you know? The gossip is on everybody's tongue!" A deep scrutinizing look, finger tapping thoughtfully against the man's bicep. "You look like Siren, you *walk* like Siren, but last time I checked Siren was on the chopping block for dear old Schlatt--"

"You'll do better to keep your nose out my business," Tommy interrupts, rolling his shoulders as Techno releases him, mentally cursing the man to hell and back as he slips a hand into the pocket of the coat, clenching it tight. "If you feel attached to it," he adds as Manifold opens his mouth.

The man spreads his hands out, clipboard and all. “You look familiar, is all I’m saying, maybe we get our hair cut at the same place-“

“Information costs,” Techno cuts in, a rumble of warning in his voice. “Stop fishing for it.”

Manifold draws back with a nervous laugh, smile turning back down with a blip of blue pixels. “Alright, alright man- can’t blame a guy for trying. So-“ The clipboard gets spun up, given a false studious onceover. “Looking for someone? Here to watch the show? Place some bets-“

Manifold’s hand twists palm up as he talks and Techno reaches past Tommy, pressing down on top of it, Manifold’s fingers curling tight around it and slipping it down into his pocket.

“- There’s beverages being served inside, I think someone whipped up some hot dogs for selling if you’re hungry!” An exaggerated wink, Manifold stepping back with a sweep of his hand. “Blood God,” he nods, eyes finding Tommy’s with a furrow of his brow and flickering smile. “*Siren.*”

Tommy raises his hand, giving Siren’s iconic little two fingered salute, making sure to put as much mockery into it as humanly possible.

Techno gives him a shove with a snort as they step into the corridor, leaving Manifold to greet someone behind them.

“He’s annoying, but he’s surprisingly good at what he does,” Techno comments as Tommy falls at his side. “Knows when to keep his mouth shut too which is always *healthy* in this business.”

“I bet the money helps with that,” Tommy says in an undertone.

“Small fry Villain, doesn’t exactly pay well.”

Tommy makes a noncommittal noise.

“Doesn’t pay well to be a civilian being robbed of hard-earned income either.” He squints up ahead. “He has a weird habit of popping up here and there, always for dumb shit.”

Techno glances at him. “What did you do to catch his ire? He’s a pretty cowardly guy, not one to pick fights with *top dogs.*”

Tommy twitches.

“Hell if I know,” he bites out with a flat look that makes Techno’s mouth stretch in amusement which- of *course* the fucker was well aware of what he was doing. “You’d think I’d stabbed his favourite pet fish from the way he’s trying to kill me.”

Techno snorts. “Never said he was smart.”

There’s buzz building from ahead of them, voices cheering and crowding, and Tommy just gets a look on *way* too many fucking people when Techno tugs him right, climbing the stairs

easily, winding a good bit up before stepping into a new floor where two bodyguards' step aside to let them through.

A woman steps up, a mask hiding everything but her smile as she gives a dainty little curtsy.

"Your normal room is being set up--"

There's cat ears twitching on top of her head, white ones that makes Tommy squint suspiciously as he takes in her ensemble of soft hoodie and-

"- Can I get you anything? Some champagne? A glass of martini--"

His eyes stops at the carrot clips, realisation hitting him fast.

"Quit the act, Kitten," Techno draws.

Tommy's eyes widens, staring at the Vigilante who laughs, body language easing back into something more familiar with a bounce on the balls of her feet.

"I couldn't resist," she giggles, eyes bright as they settle on him. "Just thought I'd introduce myself to the new guy. Be polite and all that." She flashes him a V with her fingers by her eyes and Tommy fights down the mortified heat behind his mask, praying she doesn't recognise him. "I'm Kitten around these parts. I've got all the information you might need and want for the right *price*."

A wink.

Tommy resists the urge to melt his entire body behind Techno as he returns it with a studious little nod.

"Silent guy, I can appreciate that. Most men don't know *when* to be silent." She slips both hands into the pockets of her hoodie, turning her full attention on Techno. "You're drawing quite the bit of attention. We've been getting as much people out of the Pit as possible but, many won't leave, you know that, so if there's actually Heroes coming down here there's some of us who'd appreciate a heads-up."

"Angel will let you know." Techno reaches into his pocket, pulling out a small headpiece and offering it out.

He traps it when she reaches for it.

"For a price of course."

Kitten rocks back on her heel and Tommy shifts uncomfortable at the very naked desperation that flashes in her eyes. "Favour for a favour," she hurries out, glancing anxiously at the earpiece and then to him for a lingering moment before focusing back on Techno. "You know I wouldn't make that offer easily."

Techno rolls the earpiece thoughtfully before flicking it over, the thing hurriedly caught to be stuffed down a pocket, the Vigilante already turning to hurry past the bodyguards.

“You won’t get disturbed!” A hand gets raised in a wave over her shoulder. “Drinks on me!”

Tommy waits until she’s safely out of hearing before shooting Techno an unimpressed look.

“We’re Villains,” the man shrugs easily.

“Oh fuck off, Blade.”

-

The room Techno takes him to is small, a single couch with side-tables for drinks and Tommy steps to the railing as the door is locked behind him, peering through the window down at the people crowding below them.

Behind him Techno opens something up, pouring it and-

The fighting ring is a bloody cage in the middle, the roar muffled behind the glass, the violence a pounding thing that rises with a roar of the crowd as one of the people inside it slams hard against the metal webbing.

They’re both bare chested, hybrid features on full display, almost *flaunted*, and there’s a grin of enjoyment on the man who steps forward, tail swishing from side to side behind him as the one of the ground pushes weakly up.

The anticipation burns thick in the crowd, muffled here, above and removed.

His stomach twists uncomfortably.

“Hybrids spend their lives hiding their features, cowering into the pretence of humanity on the surface.” Techno steps up beside him, two glasses held in one broad palm, one offered out. “They have no need to hide here.”

Tommy stares at the familiar amber liquid.

“Does it look vicious to you?” Techno asks with a rumble, tail swinging behind him as Tommy slowly reaches out to take it. “The Pit is about taking *pride* in what we are.” The man raises the glass up, studiously considering it with a swirl. “To embrace it. To show it off. To prove that we’re more than the world would pretend us to be.”

“You talk as if you used to be in them,” Tommy manages to get out, the glass cold in his hand.

“Needed to unlearn some habits, it was as good a place as any,” Techno says with a baring of his tusks.

Tommy stares up at him, at the piglin features that seem all the more intense here, the pink skin and tusks born proud where his civilian form had almost erased them completely.

He looks down again, his own tail curling tighter around his midriff, studying the roar of the crowd, the way the winner has both hands over his head, egging it on, giving his opponent a

chance to finally push to his feet, wiping blood from his face with a snap of his own long scaled tail behind him, the spines along his spine flaring up sharp.

“Are powers forbidden?” he wonders, unable to help the curiosity.

“To a degree.” Techno steps back, dropping down on the couch and throwing the heel of his foot up to rest on his knee as he leant back. “Some, like me, can’t exactly deactivate them.”

He somehow makes the couch look small, easily taking up more than one cushion.

Tommy observes him take a sip of the whisky with a wrinkle of his nose.

“Should you really be drinking that now?”

“My powers burns right through them.”

Tommy gives his own drink a dubious look.

“There’s no word from the Angel yet, it’ll be at least another hour before anything happens. The drugs they shot you up as a Hero should burn through that before then.”

“I’d rather not take any chances.” He places it down on the closest table, turning and dropping down on the couch, slumping back on it.

“Suit yourself,” Techno shrugs with a hum.

The muted buzz of the crowd below falls into pleasant background noise and when he glances aside it’s to see Techno flip open a book, resting it in one palm.

The picture he makes reminds him eerily of Dream and Tommy’s heart twists sharply.

Minutes passes by, the flip of a page caught at the corner of his eyes.

“One hour?” Tommy asks finally, the lethargic feeling creeping back on him with the fading buzz of adrenaline and he blinks slowly, staring up at the ceiling.

“One hour,” Techno agrees.

Tommy raises a hand, grinding the heel of his palm into his eyes, staring at the window, feeling the sweet coolness of the air, slowly sliding further and further down the couch and unwinding his tail.

He folds his arms across his chest.

“Not the most comfortable spot to nap, Blade,” he mumbles, eyes already slipping shut. “Wake me up if anything exciting happens. Or if you decide to be a wrong'un.”

The words are slurred out, sleep taking him before he can catch a response to them.

Chapter End Notes

It's been a while but I've returned! How exciting. First some exciting news: Isa, one of the HN server mods, is helping me put together a Hush index with easy access for basic character information. It'll be ready in a few days as it looks now and she's been doing an absolutely amazing job with it. I'll get some information about it up on my social media when it's done but it'll be linked in a channel on my server for easy access.

Now- extra thank you to Dewdrop, Houxey and Tiny for the help this chapter<3

I've been mentally titling this chapter "trust exercise" and what do ya know- I hope you're all enjoying the bedrock bros content

...

:)

Hope you're all having a good one wherever you are out there and thank you so much for all the comments and support and fanart and just- it's amazing. You guys are amazing. Sending much love<3

-

If you're interested there's a [Hush Now Discord](#) that tends to go *brrrrr* with the theories in designated channels and also have a lot of fun chatter and chill people on top of scoops of chaos with my lovely mods<3

You can find me on **tumblr** here: [corpse-art](#)
And I'm also on **twitter** now here: [corpsey_art](#)

I post a one hour countdown on all my social medias for a new chapter update if you're interested in such a thing :)

-

DUDES. We have new Hush Now art!! They're all amazing. Go and give them all so much love<3

(And if I ever miss linking your art- pls let me know!! I try to make sure I keep track of everything but I am but human)

[TRAITOR by MissTMo1](#) art

[That Could Have Gone Better by blissfali](#) art

[Tommy Can't Afford the Weakness by azrail-bela](#) art

[Wilbur, Dream and Tommy by unnaturalbleu](#) art

[Tommy vs McChill by_ghostiereanimated](#) art

[Tommy with an Axe by_DreamyStardust](#) art

[Tommy by_NoasTea](#) art

[Pinned like a bug by_NoasTea](#) art

[Roses and Wings by_MissTMo1](#) art

[Siren by_doxy_lvjy](#) art

[George and Quackity by_MmmGooseFeet](#) art

[FANART MASTERPOST](#)

Chapter 44

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Anything new?” Techno loops one arm around the passed-out Hero beside him, hauling him up as he leans back, preventing him from slipping the last bit off the couch into a rude awakening.

There’s a mumble, fingers twitching as Theseus twists, automatically searching out the heat Techno’s body offers and pressing against him, slumping bonelessly against his side, cheek mushing above Wilbur’s mask as his head comes down on his chest with a sleepy snort.

He can feel Chat, their curiosity prickling at his skin before fading back to the distant lull as they feel the ease of his own emotions, a few of them cooing, their chatter distant and easy enough to tune out.

“Schlatt is getting anxious,” Phil reports, his voice low and crackling in the earpiece.
“There’s a lot of movement but no sign of Siren or Dream yet.”

“Pandora?” Techno lays an absent hand on top of Theseus’ head, keeping a careful eye on him from the corner of his vision with the furrow of dark brows that brown curls brushes against.

“There’s been an increase in guards but nothing we didn’t expect.”

The little snuffles, roaming eyes and twitching fingers are all sign of deep sleep and easy to watch for, different from the way Wilbur slept like dead weight once he’d curled himself around the closest thing- be it human or pillow or guitar.

When they were younger Wilbur would knock on his door in the middle of the night, all dark shadows under his eyes, spindly looking with the way he’d shot up in height suddenly, and Techno would drag the covers back, letting his brother climb in without a word needed between them.

The first few times Wilbur had wrapped himself around a pillow, keeping his distance, and Techno had laid awake, watching the drawn thin shoulders, one of those well-worn band t-shirts Wilbur favoured practically drowning him.

But after Wilbur had woken up from a nightmare beside him Techno had found it came naturally to tug him closer, offering comfort to his brother as he burrowed against him.

Fourteen and seventeen, despite the age difference between them they had rarely felt it, an understanding between them rooting deep during those early days.

Both a bit fucked up, angry at the world, bitterness that had grown sense of pride and need for change.

The world wouldn't move for them so they'd make it.

"How are you holding up?" Phil's voice gentles, not quite parental, but close.

The bond that had fallen between them was friends first, an understanding of unfaltering support, of always having each other's back.

Techno had been fourteen when Phil found him- too old to truly need a parent, but not so old that he didn't need a guiding hand, especially with the Hero program clinging like sludge to his thoughts, Blood God's voice pounding with a rising violence and thirst for blood so overwhelming he'd nearly killed Wilbur in a fit of rage one sunny afternoon.

He'll never forget coming back from it, Wilbur wide-eyed on the floor behind Phil, a deep jagged wound bleeding wetly between fingers pressed against it.

It had only made him all the more resolute to control himself- pulled down to rest his forehead against Phil's shoulder, breaths still heaving and kitchen knife clattering to the floor as the horror sunk into his bones.

He doesn't remember what had set him off and Wilbur had never brought it up, lips thinning and head shaking when he'd tried to press him on it.

"Don't do this to yourself," Wilbur had said, palming for a cigarette, eighteen and delighting in a new habit that would bring him all the closer to an early death.

Techno wasn't ignorant of his brother's habits, of his not-always great state of mind that made him volatile and self-destructive.

Wilbur had never embraced the Syndicate, keeping his distance from the other members, coming and going on his own whims and wants, often leaving mid-meeting without any explanation even when Techno or Phil had pressed him on it.

He'd wanted nothing to do with Ranboo or Tubbo and the closest thing to a friend he had was Niki and Quackity and even there Wilbur had made things more complicated than they needed to be with the way he'd shifted suddenly, cruelty bleeding into his voice when he got into one of his *moods*.

Techno loves his brother, despite his idiosyncrasies, perhaps because of them, there's no questions about it, but it didn't stop Wilbur from frustrating him when his brother would clam up with half-truths, tight-lipped smiles and whims that were more trouble than they were worth.

Like how he'd come dragging home a mouthy civilian teenager with enough issues and secrets that he wasn't surprise Wilbur had gotten himself attached.

It was easy to see how Wilbur saw echoes of himself in those suspicious eyes.

Protective, co-dependent idiots the both of them.

There's a part of himself that Techno doesn't like acknowledging- the part of him that had been envious to see life brought back into his brother's eyes, resentful and bitter even when he was relieved because Wilbur had been spiralling badly and he-

He hadn't been enough to bring his brother out of it.

He should have been.

Wilbur was his *brother*. There'd always been an understanding between them, even when temper got the better of him and Wilbur's silver tongue turned words to sharp knives with cruel accuracy.

"Brothers fight," Phil had said, a reassurance after Wilbur had slammed the door in his face, disappearing with only a short *'I'm fine, don't look for me'* text that stares back at Techno from Phil's phone screen.

It had been four days before Wilbur had returned, climbing in through his window and flopping face down on the pillow beside Techno without as much as a greeting as Techno hardly dared to breathe.

But when he had reached a hand out, Wilbur's had reached back, their fingers tangling in a tight desperate grip of white-knuckles and brotherhood.

But despite that- Techno hadn't been *enough*.

Instead it was Tommy who brought the smile back to Wilbur's eyes, who scrubbed the shadows beneath his eyes, who made Wilbur sing for the first time in months, the notes of La Jolla bleeding through the walls to keep him awake long after they had faded to silence.

And then Tommy had upped and disappeared and Wilbur had gotten himself captured.

"Coping," he grunts, thumb rubbing absently against the side of the Hero's face as he burrows closer against him, muttering in his sleep, no real words but agitation clear before he settles down with a grumpy noise that makes Techno's mouth twitch despite himself. "McChill refused to give any information of value but Eris made sure he's not going to be a problem at least."

Their plans depend on the Hero asleep against him and it would be *inconvenient* if Red Chaos discovered just what had happened to McChill the moment he left his fellow Hero behind.

A trip deeper into the Pit had been a good distraction.

"And Bad was a bit of a dead-end as well I heard," Phil muses, a note of oddness in his voice that makes him raise a brow.

"You were listening, weren't you?" Techno asks, amused as he shifts to plant both boots down on the floor.

"How could I not?" Phil laughs, a quiet sound, wind blowing in the background, and Techno can hear the distant rustle of his wings. *"There are not many like me left. Those old enough to*

remember the world as it was before. ”

Phil had never gone out of his way to hide what exactly he was from them. A human blessed by the Goddess of Death herself to walk the world with dark mantling wings, changed into something otherly with the passing of time.

Techno and Wilbur had both spent nights listening to Phil’s nostalgic musings of his youth-of a world where adventures had waited around every corner with unexplored lands, caves and forests saturated with magic, the veiled gaze of the Goddess of Death shadowing his steps until one day she’d greeted him by name.

Kristin, Phil calls her fondly, hand pressing over his heart and the pendant that rested there.

“Old man,” Techno teases but it falls flat without Wilbur there at his side to add to it.

“Oi! I’m practically a spring chicken compared to the likes of Bad,” Phil protests and Techno snorts.

“Whatever makes you sleep better at night.”

A lull of silence falls between them but Techno makes no move to close the connection, eyes slipping close, a heavy breath drawn where he sits in the Pit with Theseus sleeping peacefully.

Trustingly.

“Ranboo and Tubbo disappeared from the Syndicate hide-out,” Phil tells him after a long moment.

Techno groans quietly. “Of course they did.” He drags a hand up his face, rubbing his palm over his eyes beneath the mask. “Any idea of what they’re up to?”

“Given what’s going on?” Phil snorts. *“I’ve got my crows keeping an eye out for them but Tubbo is good at staying under the radar.”*

“Jester taught him well.” Techno acknowledges grudgingly with a harsh breath.

Mama duck and baby duck, Chat titters and Techno grimaces at the sudden flood of emotions from his backseat drivers.

I wonder if he’ll pick a fight with Schlatt

Or break into Pandora for a rescue mission

I bet he’ll do both

Both

Both

Both

Foolish little children in over their head

“Well, nothing we can do about them now.” He drops his hand. “Let me know if anything changes.”

“Will do.” A beat. *“We’ll get him back, Techno.”*

“We will.”

“Whatever it takes,” Phil says quietly before the connection clicks shut and Techno glances down at Theseus.

“Yeah,” he agrees to no one in particular.

The Hero curls further on himself and it looks almost painful with the way his knobbly shoulders presses against Wilbur’s Siren coat, the thinness from too much healing and too little food stark even half-hidden behind the mask that slots over his face.

Techno respects the guy, he can admit that much.

And perhaps there’s a part of him that admires the gutsy stubbornness that drives him forward even with the whole world turned against him.

“This is only because you look like him,” Techno grumbles under his breath before he breathes out a sigh, digging out one of the pillows behind him with a bit of careful manoeuvring, nudging at the Hero to press it into the cradle of his arms.

Theseus curls around it immediately and Techno throws the tail of his cloak over him with a snort.

-

Eret carefully pulls on their gloves, flexing his fingers as he steps over the twitching form of the Hero on the floor clawing at his throat, black veins crawling up his arms, up his chest, curving over his jaw with skin turning ashy grey, eyes bulging.

Their boot presses down and a hand lashes out, desperate fingers clasping at the heel of their pants, mouth opening but no words escaping.

Eret lowers themselves into a crouch, thumb and index finger curling around McChill’s wrist to pull weak fingers off him while they reach to push up their mask with their other hand.

“It’s nothing personal,” he assures the other as McChill wheezes desperately for air. “Sometimes we just have to do what’s needed as Heroes, I’m sure you understand that.”

McChill stares at them with dawning realisation and horror, lips turning blue, grey, black veins creeping into his mouth with a horrible gurgling noise and spastic twitching of his fingers.

“Roy-“ McChill gags, breath whistling with the closing of his throat.

“I’m doing you a favour, really,” Eret says reassuringly. “Once the world realises that truth of its Heroes you’ll be better off having died a martyr.” They lean closer. “I’ll make sure they remember you.”

Eret releases them, straightening up with a brushing of their hands against their knees.

“I’ll tell Rose hello from you.”

There’s a broken wheeze of protest, a last breath drawn as they pull the door shut behind them.

Eret leans back against it, closing their eyes and breathing in, trembling fingers pressing against their lips.

“It needed to be done,” they tell themselves with a breath. “For *Niki*. ”

-

“I’m a spy,” Charlie peps himself up in a whisper, pacing in the small ventilation shaft. “Mr. Red entrusted me with an important mission and once I’m done I can go join him on his adventure!”

He stops, draws a big breath, holding it before letting it out with a wet soundless *pop*.

Charlie clenches tiny hands in the knitted sweater Red had made for him, taking comfort in the connection to the other as he inches closer to peer out through the grid of the ventilation shaft.

The room is big with papers and books scattered messily, a clock ticking on the wall in the silence, and he looks down at the green man hunched on himself with fingers clenched tight in blond wavy hair.

Red’s Dream.

He tilts his head, glancing nervously around.

The ram man and big fluffy beast is nowhere to be seen.

Come home, big him urges at the back of his mind and Charlie shakes his head vehemently.

Red needs me, he shoots back. *I pinkie promised!*

He pushes hard at the connection, focusing all his attention on his mission and ignoring the curiosity from all the little different hims.

He reaches out, carefully pressing forward, letting himself carefully melt through it and down the side of the wall until he reaches the floor where he reassembles himself with a small breath, adjusting his glasses carefully before taking a step forward.

“Mr Dream sir?” he squeaks out.

Red’s Dream jerks on the couch, a white mask with a black smile looking directly at him, and Charlie draws back a bit unsurely at the prickling tension that falls heavy in the room.

“You’re one of the slimes of Jester’s little spy network.” The voice is rough and tense.

“Red sent me!” Charlie speaks up hurriedly, hands twisting into his sweater and stretching it out to show it off. “He made me this, see?”

Dream shoots to his feet and Charlie stumbles back as the Hero hurriedly steps towards him, stilling only as the man falls to his knees in front of him, palms pressing down against the floor, hunching over him.

“Red-?” Dream breathes in an urgent whisper, leaning closer, so quiet he can barely be heard. “*Red Chaos* sent you here?”

Charlie nods hesitantly, fiddling with the thread of his hoodie.

“I’m Jester’s!” He adds a bit defensively. “But I like Red! So I’m *helping*. ”

“He’s-“ Dream’s voice trembles. “He’s okay? Red- *he’s okay?*”

Charlie blinks up at the smiling mask above him.

“He’s looking for you,” he tells the Hero who stills, not a muscle moving and Charlie puffs out his chest importantly. “He wants you to know he’s working with the Syndicate and- and if you break your word, and kill Siren, he’s *never* forgiving you.”

There’s a long stretch of disbelieving silence.

“He’s what now?” Dream croaks in shock.

“That’s his message,” Charlie nods proudly. “He said you promised and you gotta keep promises you know!”

There’s a twitch of the fingers beside him before the hand raises to the mask, palm hiding the smiling mouth, leaving just dark dots to stare at the wall over him.

“He’s-“ Dream’s voice quiets with a click of his teeth, head turning sharply, and then Charlie found himself lifted up and stuffed into the back of a hood hurriedly drawn up as Dream rose sharply to his feet.

He grasps onto the fabric of the undershirt and gripping it tight as he huddles down to peek out as the door opens.

“Sapnap.” Dream’s voice is hard and unreadable. ”You’re not supposed to be here.”

Charlie perks up excitedly but the automatic greeting quiets with a *pop* of nervousness because Sapnap looks mad.

Really mad.

“*Dream.*” The word is gritted out, Sapnap kicking the door shut behind him, eyes darting around the room suspiciously before snapping back onto Dream. “No more fucking hiding. You- you have no goddamn idea how *massively* you’ve screwed things up!”

Dream tenses, chin raising. “I don’t know what you’re-“

“Oh no, we’re not doing this today!” Sapnap growls and Charlie melts further against Dream at the rising temperature in the room. “I’ve had it with you and your self-destructive habits and stubborn insistency on doing things on your own!”

Sapnap steps closer, one finger shoved into Dream’s chest, and Charlie ducks further down.

“You gonna keep being a little bitch, huh, *Dreamy*? I don’t know what the hell your plans are but fucking *this*? It’s not working, man. And it’s about fucking time you realise you’re standing in a burning house of your own making!” Sapnap’s hands fists in Dream’s hoodie, yanking him forward and down with a growl. “Jester and Nemesis have been captured, Siren is about to be publicly executed, Schlatt is planning a goddamn *war* against the people in the Pit and *Red Chaos* is being hunted by the whole fucking city!”

Sapnap glowers, eyes swirling with flecks of red and yellow that dances prettily against the brown.

“You’re losing the faith of the public, Dream.” Sapnap’s voice lowers, desperation creeping into his voice. “If that doesn’t light a match under your ass I don’t know what will! You spent years getting to this point and you’re throwing it all away and you won’t even tell me *why*.”

Charlie clings nervously, staring at Sapnap with wide-eyes from the shadows.

“This is not a conversation to be had here,” Dream says after a long stretch of silence, voice tense.

“Yeah, well, we only have here and now because Schlatt is going to war against the goddamn Pit in less than an hour and I’m being sent down there because it’s my *‘responsibility as a good Hero’*.” Sapnap quotes sarcastically with his fingers as he draws back, releasing the other. “I had to look that asshole in the face and swear I was loyal to him and then I had to sneak into your room like a criminal. A goddamn criminal, Dream! To see my supposed *best friend*. And the only reason I could is because everyone is being hustled around like fucking sheep for this shitshow!”

Dream doesn’t respond, quiet, face hidden and unreadable behind his mask.

“Do you even *care*?” Sapnap demands, hair wild and harried and mouth twisting. “I thought- that at least you’d want to know about Red, you know?” A laugh, disbelieving and loud, ringing emptily in the room. “I didn’t agree then and I don’t agree now and he’s proving you wrong! He’s being twice the man, you are, Dream, and he’s still just a fucking *teenager*. He didn’t stay out of shit, if anything he’s so deep in things right now that he’s about to step into

the middle of a goddamn war for you! Because *you* taught him that. And he doesn't even have your powers to rely on because you took that from him!"

Sapnap's breaths are harsh, the heat in the room nearing suffocating levels.

"Like, come on Dream, what did you expect to happen?" Sapnap goads, eyes dark and dangerous with a twist of his lips that bares teeth in a grimace. "Did you really think he'd go off to live happily ever after when he's fought to stay by your side every step of the way, huh? That he'd settle down, go to- what, *school*? While you're skulking behind Schlatt like some fucking ghost?"

"Red is clever," Dream says quietly, arms drawing tight around his chest. "I made sure he'll be *fine*-"

"He *isn't*," Sapnap interrupts furiously, voice breaking, and Dream jerks, head snapping up. "He isn't *fine* Dream. He's so far beyond fine that it's laughable!"

"What are you on about?" Dream demands tensely. "I only broke a few ribs-"

"He-" The anger drains out of Sapnap's face and Charlie peers wide-eyed at him, clinging mute inside the neon green hoodie. "Warden got to him," he says, finally, fingers running through the dark strands of his hair with a downward twist of his lips. "He- Dream he was fucking *tortured* and I-" Sapnap draws a harsh breath, stepping back to collapse on the couch as Dream stands frozen. "I made- I fucking made things worse and- I- I *swore* I wouldn't mix shit up but I *did* and I told the Syndicate that he- that he didn't have his *powers*-"

"*You did what*-"

"I was hoping it would make them- I don't know, lock him up, keep him out of this shitshow!" Sapnap throws his hands out, looking hopelessly up at Dream, guilt in his eyes. "You know what he did?"

"Sapnap-"

"*You know what he did*, Dream?" Sapnap repeats with a deadly sort of calmness and a trembling upturn of his lips. "You know how we used to joke that he'd cut off an arm and a leg if it meant coming back to you? *Loyal as a dog*." He drops his face into his palms "It was just- it was just supposed to be *jokes*."

Dream stops breathing.

"But he- he fucking chopped his arm off to get that stupid bracelet off and then he went and bit Blood God like the fucking feral thing he is." Sapnap tugs harshly at his hair. "He's- he's *desperate*, Dream, and he's not *stopping*." He looks up, a swirl of guilt and anger in the depths of his eyes. "I don't think he knows *how to*."

"Why were you even with the Syndicate in the first place?" Dream demands quietly. "Why- why the hell would you-" Dream's voice rises as Sapnap tenses on the couch. "You betrayed him!" he snarls.

“Oh don’t you-“ Sapnap shoots to his feet, eyes wild and fire flaring at his knuckles. “Don’t you talk to me about betraying him when you did that *first*-“

“I didn’t tell his enemies he’s fucking defenceless, Sapnap!”

Sapnap’s mouth snaps shut and he flinches back, wobbling unsteadily on his feet where he stands, fire licking around his knuckles and chest heaving too hard.

“They don’t-“ Sapnap licks his lips. “It’s not- I did what I *needed* to do! They don’t- they don’t hurt *children*-“

“You have no idea the lengths they would go for each other!” Dream laughs disbelievingly. “For Siren? All bets are out the fucking window. They have killed before and they will kill again to get him back!” Dream makes a low noise, the tension draining out of him with a harsh breath. “Red is a Hero first, Sapnap, before he’s anything else. And he’s *mine*. You *know* how dangerous that is.”

The fire flickers and dies and Sapnap swallows thickly, shoulders slumping.

“I... think I might be compromised.” Sapnap closes his eyes. “I’m- Jester is my fiancé.” He snorts. “Well, one of my fiancés but that doesn’t matter right now-“

“What-“ Dream chokes out.

“I can’t do this Dream,” Sapnap’s mouth thins into a harsh line, raising his chin to stare straight into the smiling mask. “I can’t- I’m not okay with how things are right now and I refuse to work for *Schlatt* of all people to go to war against the Pit. You know how much that place means to Dad.” His knuckles bunches tight. “You can either tell me what the hell you’ve got planned or- or I’m just gonna have to do things on my own because I’m not leaving Jester in Pandora.”

They stare at each other and after a long moment Sapnap takes a step back, something indescribable in his face.

“You-“ Sapnap shakes his head. “So this is it, huh, Dream?”

“Why are you trying to divide us?” Dream asks desperately but Sapnap lets out a loud barked laugh.

“Me? *Me* divide us!?” He demands disbelievingly. “Take a hard look in the mirror, Dream, and take off that fucking mask when you do because it’s not *me* but *it* tearing us apart.”

Dream flinches, palm flattens over the mask, but he makes no move to remove it, the silence stretching between them with the ticking of the clock on the wall.

The flare of hope in Sapnap’s eyes dwindles and dies, smothered like the last dying embers.

“Yeah, I thought so,” he scoffs. “You’ve made your stance perfectly clear, Dream.” Sapnap’s face twists into something horrible. “It was supposed to be the three of us- the *dream*

team. What a fucking laugh.” He takes another step back, mouth twisting. “It’s like- it’s like I don’t even *know you* anymore, man.”

“Sap-“

“Enjoy your lonely throne, for however long Schlatt lets you keep the title,” Sapnap interrupts, turning and yanking the door open. “And tell George he owes me fifty for that stupid burger if he ever turns up.”

The door shuts close behind him, heavy and final.

-

Tommy wakes up curled around a pillow, arms wrapped tight around it, knees drawn up, his side pressed against something warm, the heat sinking into his bones, making it an entirely unattractive prospect to drag himself into the reality he finds himself in.

He blows out a breath, prying his eyes open, grimacing behind his mask as the light hits his eyes and-

He blinks, staring down at the red that rests over his knees.

The situation slowly dawns as he traces it up to the Villain, far closer than he’d been, *much too close*, and Tommy realises he’s slumped side-ways, his cheek squished awkwardly against Techno’s arm, the red cape half-thrown over him.

His breath quivers with his exhale, his mind struggling to wrap around touch that doesn’t hurt, feeling the rise and fall of the man’s chest beside him, the book still open, resting against the tips of pink fingers.

It’s... kindness.

Strange and unexpected and Tommy aches for it, fingers sinking into the pillow in his lap, knees tucking just a bit closer against it.

It’s not trust, exactly, but-

He grasps the pillow tighter, teeth sinking into the inside of his cheek.

“Awake?” the Villain turns his head, peering down at him inquisitively.

“No.” Tommy closes his eyes stubbornly.

There’s a low rumble of a laugh against his cheek.

“We still have time,” Techno tells him and-

“The calm before the storm,” he mutters back quietly, dread knotting tight in his chest.

Chapter End Notes

HAPPY BIRTHDAY MY BELOVED DEWDROP<3 Have a Hush Now chapter until I can celebrate you in person<3

(And shout-out to Mary for telling me I needed to make Sapnap's dialogue more "bitchy". She was right.)

Before we begin: there's now a **Hush Now Index** created by me and Isa, and you can access it in the "Hush Now Index" channel on my server for those of you who are interested! Hella shout-out to Isa for the incredible work she put into it<3 It looks amazing.

With that said-

Tommy got to nap through this chapter, he deserved it, truly.

See, I can be kind :)

I'm gonna go lazily stretch out for a bit but I've been excited to get to Sapnap and Dream - been a long time coming, so to say. Lots of things are picking up and like Tommy says, it's just the calm before the storm so hold on tight.

Thank you for all the love and support<3 hope you're having a good one wherever you are<3

-

If you're interested there's a [Hush Now Discord](#) that tends to go *brrrr* with the theories in designated channels and also have a lot of fun chatter and chill people on top of scoops of chaos with my lovely mods<3

You can find me on **tumblr** here: [corpse-art](#)
And I'm also on **twitter** now here: [corpsey_art](#)

I post a one hour countdown on all my social medias for a new chapter update if you're interested in such a thing :)

-

DUDES. We have new Hush Now art!! They're all amazing. Go and give them all so much love<3

(And if I ever miss linking your art- pls let me know!! I try to make sure I keep track of everything but I am but human)

[Bring It On by Noastea](#) art

[Angel of Death by overcute--pesc](#) art

[FANART MASTERPOST/incomplete \(i'm trying to catch-up/find a better way to share them, my apologies\)](#)

Chapter 45

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“It’s time.”

Tommy stumbles to his feet at the nudge, giving himself a rough shake, hand pawing roughly at his eyes to get rid of the crust with a huff.

He pauses, staring down at the emptied-out arena. Sees the stains on the concrete, old blood dried into the cracks, glass shattered and old bottles and cans discarded without care.

A single person is left behind- a mop dragging wet to leave a dark grey trail in the midst of it all.

He registers the eerie silence with a slow blink before turning around on his heel.

“I need to take a piss,” he announces loudly.

Techno jerks a thumb in the direction behind his shoulder where he’s still seated on the couch, clearly observing him. “Out and to your first left. Be quick though, we need to head out.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Tommy mutters, bouncing up on the balls of his feet to stretch out the muscles with a quick roll of his shoulders and a harsh breath.

“You want something to eat?” Techno calls behind him.

“Get me an apple!” Tommy hollers back. “Green!”

Two guards’ glances towards him when he steps into the hallway and he ignores them, kicking the door shut behind him and making a beeline into the short corridor, finding the door at the very end and slipping inside.

Harsh bright lightning makes him wince, hand raising automatically to shield himself, blinking furiously.

“I’m awake already, sheesh,” he complains, struggling against the nervousness thrumming through his veins, a jittery sort of feeling that makes him flex his fingers in a futile effort to temper it as he takes a hesitant step forward, avoiding the mirrors and peeling off his gloves.

He sticks his hands beneath the second crane and ice cold water splashes down on them automatically, washing over pale and pink skin of his mismatched limbs as he stares down at them, mouth twisting behind his mask.

Behind him his tail wags back and forth in short anxious little swishes that he forces to a stop with a deliberate flick before curling it back around his midriff.

Almost three months ago Dream had nearly killed Wilbur.

Almost three months ago Tommy's entire life had changed in a single night.

His left-hand wraps around his wrist, feeling the thrum of the God mark instead of the warmth of the power dampener, a strange reassurance.

He's not helpless anymore.

He looks up, into the mirror, brown eyes staring back at him, a strange sort of look in their shadowed depth.

"It's time," he echoes.

He wonders what, exactly, it'll mean for him.

-

Techno solves his conundrum with how the hell he was supposed to eat the apple with Wilbur's stupid mask on by plucking it out of his hands, the tips of his fingers digging in, splitting it easily in half and working off chunks that he passes without a word for Tommy to cram up behind the mask, biting down on the bitter fruit with a crunch.

"I thought they were evacuating," he says through a mouthful as they step out of the depth of the Pit, unable to resist one last look at the crowded streets and this society built far away from the open skies above.

"Some will," Techno says, tone hard to read as Tommy glances up at him. "But to many, this is their home."

"Why take the fight down here then?" he wonders as they trade the artificial red light of the Pit for the dark corridor that will take them up to the surface level of it.

"Because there's more than the Syndicate taking a stance today," Techno rumbles as Tommy reaches one hand out to grasp at his cloak. "And more than the Syndicate who wants the Enforcers out of the Pit."

A piece of apple is nudged against his outstretched hand and he takes it slowly.

"You're aiming for a full-scale war, aren't you?" he asks bluntly, right hand curling tighter in the soft fabric, staring blindly ahead into the darkness.

"We will do what is necessary."

It's not a no.

"Here's a lesson for you, Theseus," Techno says, voice lowering. "The only thing that works in this world is that you treat others as they treat you." The man's steps are heavy beside him and Tommy's fingers curls tighter, knuckles straining against the leather of his gloves.

“Those that treat me with kindness- I will repay that kindness tenfold. And those that treat me with *injustice*. That *use me*- “

Tommy’s stomach knots.

“-that hunt me down and hurt my friends, my *family*. ” Red eyes, glowing bright in the darkness meets his. “I will repay that injustice a thousand times over.”

-

“About time!” Faux Pas bursts out when he catches sight of them, pushing off the railing he’d been perched on and landing on light feet.

There’s a feeling of anticipation in the air, a lingering tension on the wide-open streets, a few hybrids scattered around, giving them ample of space.

In the midst of it all Bad’s towers stretches almost ominously with the cracks that glow, rippling with red light that sparks around the diamond man trapped in the midst of it all. A sense of disturbance.

Tommy’s mouth twists.

“We’ve only been here a handful of minutes,” Eret comments with a laugh where they’re leant back at the same railing, head inclining in greeting when Tommy looks to them.

“Everything go well?”

“As well as it could,” Techno says before Tommy can open his mouth. “Business all taken care of?”

“It has been done,” Eret acknowledges, straightening their shoulders.

“Good,” Techno says and Tommy glances warily towards him.

“What-“

“Here,” Eret interrupts, grasping the backpack at their feet and throwing it over to Tommy who catches it automatically.

It’s a sleek black thing in leather and when he turns it curiously his eyes stops at the small familiar spiral in purple and green that dangles from the tab, thumb brushing over it.

“Chronos sends his regards,” Eret says as Tommy looks up. “It’s your gear.”

His fingers sinks into the leather before he slides it on, letting it settle over Siren’s coat and pulling the straps tight to make sure it wouldn’t be getting in the way.

“Thanks,” he grunts in acknowledgement, voice echoing strange in Siren’s voice changer.

Faux Pax makes an impatient noise, shifting in an antsy sort of manner, a fox tail briefly visible beneath the coat tails of his poncho.

“Did you get what I asked you for?” Techno steps forward to Eret who nods, sliding him a simple wrapped package.

“He said he made some minor adjustments.”

Tommy angles his head curiously when Techno unwraps it, stilling in surprise.

Techno slides the escrima out of the sheaths in a single smooth draw, twisting them around, studying the wrap around the base.

Tommy stares at the wrap of red stripes that climbs up the flared head of them, a hum of electricity with a steady lime green glow that activates, the tip levelled towards him.

At the very head the lopsided smile he’d painted on the back of his hoodie stares back at him, glowing eerily.

Techno twists them around, huffing when he catches sight of them.

“He couldn’t resist, huh,” Techno drawls with a snort before throwing them over to Tommy who catches them at the handles with a jerk, knuckles pressing tight against the leather of his gloves as he stares down at them.

“You know how Foolish is,” Eret shrugs. “I doubt he registered half of my request.” They turn to Tommy. “You can turn up the volt level on the side.” They step forward, gloved hand reaching out, twisting the handle in his numb hands to show him. “It has a lock here-“ they demonstrate. “The light will let you know if it’s set to *stun*,” green,” or *kill*,” Eret’s voice lowers, the rippling green light bleeding to a dangerous shade of red.

“I- see,” Tommy gets out, dragging it back to green before flicking it off, hiding the tremble of his fingers by lowering them down, letting the hems of the coat slide over them.

“Why-“

“You only have so much of Nemesis’ blood left,” Techno answers, eyes unreadable where they settle on him. “You won’t be much of use if you can’t defend yourself.”

Tommy’s mouth twists, catching the sheaths deftly.

“And you account for everything, don’t you *Blade*.”

“Comes with the territory,” the Villain drawls back, mouth curling to bare tusks.

“*The Heroes are on the move.*” Tommy jolts at the crackle of Phil’s voice in his ear, hand darting up to press down. “*Prepare yourselves.*”

“Is Dream-“

“No,” Phil cuts him off.

Tommy deflates.

“Right,” he mutters. “Would have been too easy,” he breathes in a sarcastic undertone to himself.

Phil lets out a short laugh and Tommy flushes, busying himself with strapping the sheaths in place on the side of his hip, drawing them tight as Phil and Techno exchanges easy chatter.

He frowns, neck prickling, taking a step back and angling his head up, staring into the sky.

Silent, a flutter of deceptively gentle looking fairy wings in the distance, slowly lowering down until her feet lands at the very top of a pole where she straightens out, the handle of the scythe hugged against her chest, the long blade arching along the curve of her neck.

Soft pink sweater, roses and thorns in black and a pleated skirt.

Rose, the Number Five Hero, raises her hand in a delicate wave of her fingers when she catches sight of them.

Beneath them the ground ripples and Tommy is moving at the first sign of brown fur that bursts up, tearing through the concrete, twisting up to collide against Techno’s drawn axe, the piglin sliding several feet back with a grunt.

Faux Pas scrambles back with a yelp, claws sinking in to climb up the nearest house in a scurry of limbs, Eret reaching for their gloves-

Fur, brown and sharp, twists up, rustling into the form of the Number Four Hero Caribou with small reindeer horns that span out from his forehead, a blue mask with a little red nose and red details revealed with brown pelt that draws back to display blue eyes and pale skin.

An orange sporty jacket, a blue tight shirt beneath it, shoulders rolling and a hand raising in a cheekily saluted *hello*.

Behind them an explosion goes off, loud and violent with grey smoke, *Boomer*, Tommy recognises distantly as he twists the escrima sticks, the green electricity turning on with a hum.

Anticipation blossoms sharply in his chest, a distant sort of hunger, not his own, rising to accompany it with a flare of heat around his wrist.

In the distance the first scream rings out, a shout of *Enforcers*-

Tommy doesn’t have much more time to spare for thinking, eyes widening as Rose dives, twisting through the air with spread arms, eyes bright and feverish as they meet his.

-

Tubbo’s head snaps up, staring in shock at the flames that rages violent from the Hero Tower, glass shattering, spilling to the ground to a sudden call of panicked shouts and civilians grasping for phones while hurrying back.

“Sapnap,” he breathes, staring at the hot flames that climbs up the walls, a raging inferno of blinding red and yellow against the spiralling white tower.

“Should we, um, help him?” Ranboo cranes awkwardly in the small car, peering wide-eyed as more and more windows explodes, shattering to rain upon the sidewalk.

“I don’t think so big man, he seems to have it under control.”

Ranboo turns to give him a disbelieving look, gesturing with a *you sure about that* look that makes him duck his head, fingers tightening around the wheel.

“Look- I know I said we could make a distraction but if Sapnap is already on top of that-“

“We’re *not* breaking into Pandora-“

“Then it’s only *right* that we handle business elsewhere!” Tubbo says louder with false pep, reaching and twisting the key. “Better get out of here before the streets get too crowded-“

A car swerves, colliding into the one parked in front of them and he twitches, breath shallow in his chest as a child starts crying in the passenger seat, the car horn blaring loudly where a forehead presses down against it without moving.

Crows, black as the night, floods the sky, diving and swerving between the tall buildings around them, eyes white and shining and their crowing loud, a violent torrential storm of feathers that blocks out the setting sun above them.

The crows swerve down, aiming for the Enforcers spilling out from the tower with sharp beaks and furious cawing, blood splattering as talons and beaks tear into the soft human tissue of flailing limbs.

“You know what?” Ranboo says weakly, sinking low in the seat as the large wings of the Angel of Death takes to the skies above them. “Pandora- I *love* Pandora-“

Tubbo shifts the gear stick.

“- never wanted to visit a place more-“

Tubbo slams the gas, twisting the wheel in a harsh backwards twist, wheels screeching against the pavement and Ranboo grasping desperately to the handle above with a squawk as they jolt to a stop, gear shifted-

A crow lands on the hood of the car, talons tapping against the metal as it hops closer, blank white eyes peering inside at them both as Tubbo freezes in places, a shiver of something cold slithering down his spine.

“Philza is going to kill us,” Ranboo chokes out in horror, voice tinny as he melts back into the seat. “Oh God he’s actually going to kill us, we never should have come here-“

Tubbo’s heart pounds inside his chest as he grasps the wheel and floors the gas, the crow screeching as it took to the sky in a flurry of feathers behind them.

Behind them the Angel of Death lands deftly on the pavement, large mantling wings behind him, shimmering with deadly metal, and Tubbo meets blue eyes in the rear-view mirror before he takes the corner with a harsh turn, narrowly avoiding a man who lurches out of their way.

“Hold on,” Tubbo forces out, adrenaline flushing his cheeks and determination burning hot.

“I am!”

Hot lava floods out to spill down the sides of the Hero Tower behind them, a torrent of heat that glows bright against the darkening skies along with the fire that flares in a chase, car alarms and screams melding into a horrible mix with the triumphant shrieks of crows and screams of the unsuspecting civilians caught in the midst of it all.

I’m not a coward, Tubbo thinks furiously to himself, flooring it through a red light and ignoring Ranboo’s frantic voice beside him.

I’m not a coward, I’m not a coward, I’m not a coward-

Vines twists around the black leather of the wheel, blooming delicate white petals in mockery.

-

“Anyone ever tell you about yoga-“ Tommy twists, catching the scythe with a screech of metal against one stick. “I hear it’s good for your blood pressure-“ He twists, knocking the other up the chin of an Enforcer with electricity that crackles, forced into harsh twist and a roll in the next breath as fur twists to wrap around his ankle.

“Oh no, eyes on me-“ Techno slams into Caribou who squawks in surprise, fur blooming thick to take the brunt of the axe that threatens to lob his head clean off.

It ripples under the blade, flaring up, Techno yanking it back and tearing it from the thick fur before it could be torn from his hands.

“Your power is annoying, anyone ever tell you that-“ Tommy catches Techno complain before he’s distracted by a body colliding against his back, the handle of the scythe slamming down against his wrists with enough force that his fingers goes temporarily numb, escrima sticks clattering to the ground as arms loops beneath his armpits, eyes widening as his feet left the ground.

“Oh fuck no-“ he snaps, twisting and struggling, fairy wings working frantically under the double weight.

“Be still,” Rose croons, laughing as she carried them higher and higher in uneven twirling paths. “Unless you want to go *splat* like a *bug*-“

This high Tommy can see the rows of explosions, wood and bricks shattering in Boomer’s path tracing closer and closer to Techno and Eret below him, Enforcers and civilians mixing

together in desperate struggles on the streets, a carnage of bodies beneath the trample of their feet.

“Red!” Eret calls below as Tommy abandons his plan to get free and instead tightens his grip on the arms holding onto him, stomach swooping from the height, feet dangling precariously.

“Siren but *not* Siren,” Rose laughs, a thing that rattles like bells from her throat as she swings him like a toy. “Oh I’ve been promised such handsome things for your capture.”

“You’re mad,” Tommy spits out furiously. “People are *dying*.”

Rose giggles. “Oh, didn’t you know?” Her voice pitches lower as she pulls him up and closer with the bend of her spine to press her mouth against his ear. “People *do* that.”

He shivers, stomach knotting tight and teeth clenching tight behind his mask.

“I’m curious,” she hums, arms sliding forward, hugging around his midriff, a chin coming down to rest on top of his head. “I heard you were using Nemesis power.” There’s something strange in her voice, a lilting of something he doesn’t understand. “But Nemesis, beautiful as a rose, I saw her just last night, hair so pink so pretty.” He groans as her arms tightens, ribs creaking uncomfortably. “So how is it possible, I wonder? Won’t you tell me.” Her voice is a croon. “I promise I won’t tell,” she says with a whisper.

“How-“ he chokes out. “How about I *show you*?”

They halt, his legs swinging ominously in the air, so high above he can barely make out Techno tearing through a swarm of Enforcers, the ground staining red with blood that makes his heart lurch, guilt rotten and thick in his chest.

“Show me?” Her voice pitches curiously, like a child, wings humming with their fluttering beating.

“Y-yeah,” he grits out. “Don’t you want to see?” he lowers his voice in Siren’s familiar croon, angling his head up to meet her eyes.

Her brow dips, something hesitant shimmering in her eyes before her expression twists into something like a pout.

“You’re trying to trick me,” she accuses.

Tommy digs his nails into her wrists but she doesn’t as much as twitch, eyes never veering from his.

“Yeah well,” he laughs, tightening his grip. “People *do* that.”

He pushes up, slamming his head into her face in a lurch, arms slipping from around him with the *crunch* of her nose, blood splattering red and wet over his face before he falls, twisting to grab desperately for one of the glass bottles left at his hip, palm pushing up at his mask-

Rose slams into him with a furious shriek, bottle slipping out of his hand as he wrestles desperately against her, grasping at her shirt and slamming his feet to send her careening away in the air as he grasps for the last bottle, forcing it to his mouth and downing it, feeling the call of water lock in place with a palm reaching towards the rapidly approaching ground.

“Fuck-“ He yanks his fist up, water exploding up, and he barely gets his shoulder down to take the brunt of the force as he slammed into it, sure to bruise with the violent noise before he tumbled into it, mouth opening with a cough, breathing furiously inside his watery prison with the fluttering of forming gills.

He barely has time to reorientate himself before the heel of a boot slams into his ribs, sending him spinning back, the water twisting violently around him in a cascade of white bubbles, a responding force to his desperation and slipping control as it twists around him before slamming forward *to get them away* just as a hand grasps the back of his coat, hauling him out of it.

“Fuck-“ he wheezes as Techno drags him back, fumbling to grasp back control of the water and send it seeping out into the metal grates. “Where did she-“

“Eris is handling her,” Techno snorts, patting his back roughly, sloshing the water inside of him in a decidedly odd feeling. “Good job.”

The approval burns hot in his chest.

“Thought I was a goner there for a second,” he laughs out, turning to look up at the Villain and-

His mouth opens, eyes widening as Caribou lunges forward and-

Techno.

Wilbur’s brother-

He’s still looking at Tommy, his back wide-open as the Hero burst forward, and Tommy-

Tommy doesn’t think.

Hunger and violence and retribution, a deep sated *indignation* that burns hot from the very depth of his chest, all-consuming in a wrath that consumes his very being, painting his vision violently red.

His hand wraps around the handle of Techno’s heavy axe and it tears through the air with a harsh lurch, sinking through the surprised expression of Caribou with a sickening wet nose, splitting his skull in two with fur that ripples up his cheek and forehead too late, the blade stopping half-way through his face at the beginning of the metal mask and bright red triangular deer nose set in metal.

The hand slowly unwinds the fur shaped claws from twitching fingers that falls limp at his side.

Tommy's chest heaves harshly, eyes widening and fingers loosening, jerking back in horror and-

A blink, red beading from either side of the sharp edges of the axe, and then the Hero's legs were folding beneath him, knees hitting the ground and tearing the axe from his skull with a wet noise as Techno grasps the handle of it.

Two small deer horns on either side of the jagged cut, brain and blood and split bone visible before the Number Four Hero tipped forward against the wet ground.

Tommy's ears are ringing, Techno's voice a distant thing as something pulls at him, feet stumbling numbly.

Around his wrist the Blood God's mark pulses with satisfaction, like a wrathful curling snake that hungers beneath his skin.

What did you do? Tommy thinks with numb horror.

Me? Hah! I think you mean what did *you* do, the Blood God rumbles, rattling bones and teeth and a splitting headache behind his eyes he blinks wetly against. **You protected that which is yours.**

He'd never been close to Caribou, the Hero preferred largely keeping to himself, but-

Tommy had *known him*.

However distantly.

A tremble runs through him and Techno's eyes meets his.

"You saved my life," Techno says disbelievingly and Tommy doesn't understand the look that burns in those red eyes as the world rushes back to him in a cacophony of violence.

"You *killed* for me."

"I- he was going to- I *had to*-"

Stop him.

You made a choice between my Vessel and that human, Blood God whispers, mark burning hot against his skin. **A choice between who got to live... and who got to die.**

"You had to," Techno agrees with something in his voice that makes Tommy curls his fists tight. "He *knew* what he was getting into." There's hard truth in Techno's voice as Tommy tries to crane his head back only for Techno to shift, his broad stature preventing him from *seeing*. "In their eyes you're nothing more than a Villain and the Heroes are not playing by your self-made rules."

"*I know*-" His voice breaks. "I fucking *know*. But it doesn't make it *right*." Desperation bleeds into his voice.

“People die in this world.”

Tommy knows that too.

He’s seen death before.

Had been too late to stop it.

Had seen the aftermath of both Heroes and Villains and the horrific deaths from the hands of simple civilians.

The world is cruel, rotten and ugly.

Tommy knows that.

But-

“We don’t kill.” Dream’s voice is a feverish thing, palms on either side of his face. *“That’s the first and most important rule, do you understand, Tommy?”*

Dream had made him believe in something *more*.

Made him believe that *Tommy* could be something more.

The noise that escapes his throat is something inhuman, a bubbling *keen* he can’t quiet, his chest heaving, head aching with *too much* with the rattling laugh of the Blood God in the back of his mind and-

“I’m not- I’m not supposed to *kill*!”

His fingers claws down against the sides of his head, bunching the dark red fabric of Wilbur’s beanie.

Because he couldn’t let-

Techno was Wilbur’s *brother*.

His family.

And it had been so easy.

“Do you want to get back to Dream?” Techno asks Tommy’s eyes locks wildly with the Villain’s gaze as hands grasps onto his shoulder, grounding him with a squeeze, the touch seeping hot through the coat to settle against his too cold skin. “You said he needed you.”

“He does,” Tommy gets out, tongue thick in his mouth. “He- he *needs* me.”

Dream.

Wilbur.

“You think you can do this on your own, Theseus? I am your best bet. You did *good* protecting me. Real *heroic*, one might even say.” Techno lowers his face and Tommy sucks a harsh breath as the Villain’s palm settles against the back of his neck before his forehead pressed down against his, gaze heavy. “I’m *proud* of you.” The words twists like a knife inside of him. “But listen- if you cannot handle it then let me bear the burden of responsibility.”

Tommy stares into the *redredred* of his burning gaze.

“All you have to do is follow me,” the Villain promises him. “And I will carry your blame when you return to Dream, Theseus.”

Chapter End Notes

Tommy's mental state: *slowly crumbling at the seams*

:)

Hope you're having a good one wherever you are out there and thank you for all the amazing fanart and engagement, it's a wonder to see<3

-

If you're interested there's a [Hush Now Discord](#) that tends to go *brrrrr* with the theories in designated channels and also have a lot of fun chatter and chill people on top of scoops of chaos with my lovely mods<3

You can find me on **tumblr** here: [corpse-art](#)
And I'm also on **twitter** now here: [corpsey_art](#)

I post a one hour countdown on all my social medias for a new chapter update if you're interested in such a thing :)

-

DUDES. We have new Hush Now art!! They're all amazing. Go and give them all so much love<3

(And if I ever miss linking your art- pls let me know!! I try to make sure I keep track of everything but I am but human)

[Hush Now by kitty_german](#) art

[FANART MASTERPOST/incomplete \(i'm trying to catch-up/find a better way to share them, my apologies\)](#)

Chapter 46

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“All you have to do is follow me.”

Tommy’s always known he was capable of killing.

Everyone is.

“And I will carry your blame when you return to Dream, Theseus.”

He’s never been an exception, built as he was, shaped in the hands of Dream who guides him with confidence, a rare ruffle of his hair, the pride in his green eyes burning into his very soul.

He feels like he’s going to vomit.

Techno’s eyes burns into his and Tommy stands like prey in front of dangerous predator.

“I-“

A large explosion behind him makes him flinch, stone and wood clattering down on the street, shattered glass raining down and heat licking at his neck as he twists, stepping back, colliding with Techno who gives his shoulder a squeeze.

The man is warm against him, a scorching thing where he stands, ice in his veins and eyes too wide, lungs knotted so tight he feels like he can barely breathe and heart pounding even the leaden weight that settles like a physical thing in his chest.

A part of him wants nothing more than to turn around, to hide in the red cloak like a child afraid of facing the consequences of his actions, to have Techno draw him into the illusion of a hug and comfort, to promise him that everything is going to be alright.

He doesn’t want them to be enemies. He’s-

He wants Wilbur. He wants Dream.

He wants everything to *stop*.

The world doesn’t stop just because you will it so, the Blood God rumbles with a rattle of his teeth as he locks eyes with the furious figure that propels towards them, mask torn off and tears visible before Techno shoves Tommy behind him, intercepting with a twist of his axe and an explosion that rings loud, ashy grey smoke flooding out around them.

There’s shouting, words that fall like cotton on his ears, a strange sense of disconnection settling deep inside of him as Boomer and Techno trade blows, quick sharp explosions

battered away with the sharp bladed axe, forcing the Hero to put distance between them.

Sloppy, Tommy notes through the numbness, staring at the too open gaps in the Hero's defence, his mouth moving furiously with a grimace of grief and a shaking of his head.

The world is not cruel, it is not just, it simply is. The silly little frog hat on Boomer's head gets blown away, spiralling in the loud explosion that fires from the palms of his hands, Techno going low with the red cloak flaring around him in an arch, taking the brunt of it, a Enforcer decapitated where they'd lunged forward, blood arching through the air. **You humans are just unlucky fools in it.**

Techno's foot sends Boomer backwards, airborne before hitting the ground hard, sliding with palms tearing on the glass scattered, blood in their path before he pushes into a twist, an explosion sending him back in a lurch to narrowly avoid the blade of the axe that swings down where he'd been.

Tell me. The mark on his wrist burns so hot Tommy jerks, the feeling a distant thing, as if his very blood had been turned to a boiling point. **Is it the act of killing that disturbs you so, whelp?**

A hand lands on his shoulder, twisting him around, the sight of Eret's black sunglasses stilling his hand, and-

The hammer of Siren's pistol presses into the skin of his palm, index finger twitching against the curving metal of the trigger.

Or is it the prize of delivering your judgement that fills your heart with terror?

"-ED!" Eret's fingers digs into his shoulder, reality forced back to him with a harsh breath that rattles heavy lungs.

He jerks his hand away from the pistol, head snapping up, teeth clenching tight.

"I need-" The world feels strange, off-kilter beneath his feet, and he stares at Eret who leans forward amidst the chaos to hear the choked whisper of his voice. "I need to get to *Dream*."

-

The world is a strange place but amidst its turmoil there's always one thing that has made sense and Tommy's draining sanity claws for it.

The streets around him is bathed in red, the pavement splattered with blood that runs to drip down the gridded drains, Techno's cloak a distracting thing of motion amidst it all.

And-

For a moment he stares, chest heaving, as the axe buries into the soft flesh of Boomer's shoulder, tearing deep before the Hero send off an explosion that burns a deep hole in Techno's thigh to a stumble.

He stares as it hisses, flesh and muscles bubbling up to seal it back together with steam that wafts through the air, the gaping wound gone in *seconds*.

Techno rightens himself, hardly seeming bothered as he takes a confident step forward with a twirl of his axe.

Tommy knows now that he's not imagining the way the tusks seem more defined, sharper, gleaming with the gold that circles around the white, the mask looking almost small, the man broader and taller than he'd been when he knelt down to lift Tommy from the cell.

More piglin than human.

The fingers on his right-hand twitches.

"Okay." Eret's hands are a grounding thing, Tommy's eyes darting around before settling back on the dark sunglasses, seeing only himself reflected back as Eret presses his escrima back into his hands. "I'll get you back to him, I swear it."

-

Wilbur stumbles, yanked along with the shackles around his wrists, peering around him before squinting at the bright shade of neon green hoodie in front of him.

The tunnel is dark, the splashing of the water loud inside the stone walls around them.

Fire flickers from the torch Dream is holding, the other hand clenched tight around the tail end of the chain.

"You know," he comments, careful to not put too much weight on his bad leg as he limps along. "This isn't exactly my idea of *bonding*." He lifts his hands, rattling the chain. "You didn't even buy me *dinner* first-"

A tug and he catches his footing with a wince, air sucked through his teeth, hunching his shoulders with a dark look of satisfaction through the mess of his fringe.

"Feeling a bit on *edge* there, hm?" he drawls, trying not to think too hard about what he's putting his bare feet down in, nose wrinkling as water splashes up his ankles. "I suppose it's alright, we have been moving awfully fast the two of us, *anyone* would be feeling a bit overwhelmed." He spies the way Dream's fingers tightens, knuckles pressing tense against his gloves, satisfaction curling tight in his chest. "His mouth curls fiendishly. "Between the handfeeding and shaving we're *at least* at second base. In fact, I'd argue that we're a good way into third base territory depending on your *taste*-"

The first wisp of green light is his only warning but Wilbur is prepared, rocking back as a hand wraps tight around his throat, shoulders bunching to take the brunt of the force as he's slammed up against the wall.

"How did it feel, Dream?" he wonders, voice twisting in a mocking croon. "When you were pressing the knife against my throat, hm? Were you aching to dig in into my skin? To tear me

open and bleed me dry like a gutted *pig*, breaking all the rules that shackles you and betray everything you stand for?"

The muscles on the arm holding him twists tight with muscles, fingers twitching.

"Stepped on a nerve there, did I?" Wilbur tilts his head, against the thumb that digs in harshly beneath his jaw. "You know, I find it funny." It's not funny because it had been *Tommy* all this time and the guilt is eating him *alive*. "Everyone called Red Chaos a dog so confidently and yet *all this time* it was the man he followed playing *lapdog* to *Schlatt*."

"Don't you ever shut up?" Dream grits out and Wilbur *itches* to see the face he's making behind that stupid smiling mask.

He lowers his head, the flame from the torch below them both flickering up his face, Dream's gloves breaking with the tension running through him.

Ah *oh* isn't it just *delightful* to know he's getting under the Hero's skin.

"I've been wondering, Dream." Something wrathful wraps around his heart, gnarly and ugly in the way it shapes his words. "You see, I can't stop thinking about it, trying to make sense of it." Two dots and a looping smile- this close Wilbur can see the cracks that spiderwebs through it from wear and tear, a small chip missing near the right corner. "You were on top of the world, the *Number One Hero*. Everyone *dreams* to be in the position you were in and *yet*, here you are, crawling through the sewers at Schlatt's bidding." His mouth curls ugly with teeth. "It begs the question, *Green Boy*, what is it that he has on you, hm?"

Fingers tightens around his windpipe but Wilbur's grin only stretches wider, bare to see without his mask.

"It was big enough for you to sacrifice everything you worked on." Wilbur pushes his shoulders off the wall, taller than the Hero who stands small without the shadow at his side, without *Tommy*. "Big enough to throw Red Chaos out the backdoor without as much as an explanation--"

"You don't know *anything*," Dream snarls, shoulders wiring tense and pushing Wilbur back hard against the wall. "So shut your mouth, *Villain*."

"I'm a person just like you, *Dreamy*," Wilbur drags it out, grinning with teeth and mockery. "You can do your best to cling to titles and pretend you're no better than Schlatt but *I know you*."

His eyes gleam in the dark tunnel, brown glittering with a knowing kind of look.

"I don't know what you're talking about," Dream grits out, shoving him back and releasing his neck, stepping with a sharp twist of his heel, snagging the dropped chain with a tug.

"Oh I think you know exactly what I'm talking about." Wilbur's fingers ghosts up the sure to be mottling bruises on his throat, laughing as Dream gave a too hard yank, catching his footing with a stagger. "You're trying to sound like you know what you're doing so you can

prove me wrong, the *world* wrong, Dream. But the truth is- you're fucked. You were fucked the moment you threw Red Chaos out. 'Cause Schlatt knows- he's a smart man, he knows that without Red Chaos you're *nothing*. Even if you beat Schlatt you've lost! If you fight him, and he kills you, you've *lost*! Because things will never go back to what they were!"

Wilbur's bark of laughter echoes inside the tunnel, mania and something horrible and sharp in the high ringing notes, the rot of his soul bare to be heard.

"I know you're scared, Dream," he pants, mouth twisting jagged as the Hero falters, mask turning to look at him over a green shoulder as Wilbur spreads his hands as best as he can in the shackles. "I understand it's scary! It's *scary*, Dream, but you know what? In a time like this, when a man has nothing to lose, do you know what it means?"

Dream's quiet but Wilbur can feel the way his gaze bores into him.

"It means we can do whatever the *fuck* we want, Dream." Wilbur steps forward, towering over the Hero. "Have you heard the saying? *A Villain is just a Hero you haven't convinced yet.*"

"Back off," Dream says quietly, danger in the twist of his voice.

"Oh but I don't *feel* like backing off, Dream!" Wilbur shakes his head, grin feral. "In fact, I want quite the *opposite*." Another step. "I'm looking forward to becoming quite *close* with you these last hours before my execution."

He drops his head against the smiling mask, pressing his forehead down hard and lowering his voice.

"You might have ruined his past, *Dream*, but I will not allow you to ruin his future," he promises darkly.

-

Tommy folds back, palms catching in a vault, the tip of his boot slamming into an Enforcer's chin, the golden mark jerked forward, caught to be launched over him with a hard twist of muscles.

He rolls to his feet, palms sliding in grit, taking down two, a spark of power in the hands of one interrupted as he grabs for the escrimas tucked beneath his arm pits, the electricity flaring to life before he slammed it down into their chests.

"There's too many!" Eret shouts to Techno as Faux Pas collides with one sneaking up behind them, gloves discarded and orange paws with hard black laws bared to tear into a soft throat. "We need to get back to the surface!"

Bad, Tommy thinks desperately, pushing to his feet, adrenaline pumping hard through his veins with a dull sense of panic as he zaps another Enforcer with a distracted swing of his stick. *C'mon, c'mon, c'mon you old bastard-*

He looks up the tower in the midst of it all.

Are you really gonna let them do this inside your domain?

He clenches his teeth, Siren's cloak flaring as Rose tears right through a group of Enforcers, her scythe taking lives without a single movement of hesitation, black veins standing out sickly on her skin.

"Eris- " She laughs. "Oh you make me *hate*."

"Show me how much, Rose!" Eret spreads his hands, both palms bare in challenge.

There's flames spreading, dark ashy smoke thick in the air and he ducks low as Boomer goes flying over his head, bodily thrown, crouching as he snaps his head with wide eyes towards Techno who lets out a snort.

"He was annoying me," the Villain says simply, looping the head off an Enforcer behind him without looking, eyes red and dangerous as he looks out over the mess of civilians and Enforcers colliding.

The Pit was doing its best to push back- Tommy spares a moment to admire the tenacity as he watches a woman with the sharp ears of a wolf level a gun towards an Enforcer over an already dead man, firing with a gleam of her eyes and a harsh twist of her mouth.

Words and shouts drowns away, two Enforcers taken down and bound in white webbing only to get trampled over without a care, a heel sliding like butter through the cheek of the one closest to him and-

There's so much *death*.

His eyes prickles, the smoke stinging sharply as he stumbles his way to Techno who stands tall above it all.

"What now?" he demands, and it bites, it *gnaws*. "Dream and Schlatt aren't gonna come waltzing down here so- *what now*," he presses.

The earpiece crackles and he slams a palm over it.

"No sight of Dream or Siren yet but Schlatt is on the move," Phil reports amidst the sound of crows crowing and wind whistling. *"It's time."*

Techno's mouth stretches in anticipation.

"Now we join them on the surface," the Villain says.

"And what about those down here?" Tommy has to raise his voice to be heard, slamming his hand back and out, zapping the Enforcer before Techno's axe landed the blink of a second later, tearing through them like butter.

Tommy switches at the wet sound of the axe torn out of it, the sound of a body crumpling.

"They knew what they were getting into," Techno says simply.

Tommy opens his mouth to protest but there's a rumble, the very ground they were standing on shaking, and his hand lurches out, wrapping around Techno's wrist to steady himself and eyes widening as the tower in the midst of it all sparkled a violent shade of red energy.

It flares, pulses, stretching and when Tommy's eyes locks to the bubble of the diamond man there's a small hooded figure standing beside it, clawed hand resting on the glass.

"Bad," he breathes, grin stretching feral behind the mask. "I *knew* the bastard cared."

Techno grabs the back of his coat and Tommy yelps as he's hauled up, the man twisting to get him to his back, Tommy looping one arm around his neck instinctively.

"Hold on!" Techno shouts. "Eris! It's time- stop playing with her."

Eret's head snaps towards them both just as Rose twists and when she shoots down towards them they take a sharp step back, their left hand wrapping around her arm, locking tight.

Tommy's stomach twists as she falters, black veins wiggling beneath her skin where she stands, crawling up to her eyes that widens, mouth parting but no words escaping her.

And then her wings starts fluttering, slowly, oddly twitchy before they start catching up in motion just as the very ground beneath their feet splits, opening up to swallow the bodies that fall, tumbling into the dark depths.

Eret's hand never lets go of her wrist as she jerks into the air, taking them with her, and Techno crouches down, muscles bunching before he sprung up in the next motion with enough force that Tommy momentarily felt his stomach swoop, clawing down, knees digging harshly into Techno's waist as he realised the aim.

"Wait for me!" Faux Pax squawks somewhere below them as they collide with Rose and Eret, spinning through the air without grace, momentarily brought down with delicate wings working overtime with a buzz, his heart pounding in his chest, face buried into Techno's neck as shouts and screams and the sound of shattering earth slowly became more and more distant.

"Oh this is horrible, don't drop me!" Faux Pas begs somewhere below.

"If you prick me one more time with those claws of yours I'm kicking you off," Techno grunts.

"You wouldn't-"

Tommy looks up, the air leaving his lungs at the vacant look in her face, so close where he clings, Techno's broad arm wrapped around her waist.

"Is she dead?" he manages to get out, staring into the eyes that looks right past him, lost and wide, like the eyes of a doll.

She twitches, the pupil in her right eye slowly moving towards him, staring into his soul.

Ice spreads through his veins, the eye never veering from him, locked in place.

“Not yet!” Eret swings where they dangle from her wrist. “Right now she’s giving us a lift out of here!”

He swallows thickly at the macabre picture she makes, looking away to stare at Bad, his cloak fluttering in an unseeing wind where he stands, their path bringing them closer and closer to the tower.

The anger and guilt twines hot in his chest before his mouth opens, shouting in horror as the small figures steps off the tower, black fabric swirling before expanding, stretching out sharply, the air sizzling with heat that exploded out and-

Tommy gapes as Bad’s head towers up beside them in the second moment, realising with a frail grasp on sanity that he would barely measure up to the size of a sharp white fang.

The darkness wisps and flutters, stretching and swallowing the light making it impossible to see where it began and ended, a sharp thin whiplike tail crushing buildings with a cat like sweet of it.

He hears Eret shout something, sees the way Techno’s hand curls tight around the handle of his axe as two large white eyes focuses on the three of them.

“Bad-“ Tommy chokes out in shock as a hand, black as the night with clawed fingers, slowly raises to press against the ceiling where symbols flickers and flares to open into a purple hazy hue.

“Never accuse me of not caring again, Tommy,” Bad says and it’s a soft murmur against his ear despite the demon’s mouth never moving. *“Not when you bring nothing but destruction into what is mine.”*

Tommy lurches back, twisting around to keep eye contact with the demon, grasping tight to the red cloak of the Villain he clings to. “I had to-“

“No,” Bad’s voice is a curt thing, a red energy spiralling around them, lurching them up into the air. *“Consider me sparing you a mercy today.”*

And-

It feels *final*.

The broken pieces of them left behind as the demon takes a step forward, fire burning to life in the palms of his hands as they’re pushed up, up, up-

“Heroes? Villains? Who cares!” Bad’s voice echoes and bleeds over the Pit. “Let them fight.” It’s a whisper that cracks the very foundations of earth. *“I’m sick of it.”*

-and through the flickering portal that swallows them up as a raging inferno casts its path in the Pit.

“Help him,” Tommy imagines Bad saying as he buries his face into the warmth of Techno’s neck. *“Save him, like I couldn’t.”*

But the words are never spoken, nausea clawing up his gut, the world spinning around them before ending abruptly as he found himself airborne, scrambling to hold onto Techno as the overworld came back to him in an upside-down reflection.

He yelps, gravity momentarily beyond him before it came back like the snap of a rubber band, and he crashed down in a pile of wet cold snow.

“Ow,” he hisses with no real feeling, pushing down with his elbow to flop onto his back, sucking burning cold air into his starving lungs as he stares up into the dark sky for the first time in *weeks*.

He blinks, turning his head, staring at the white branches that slowly dawns familiar as Techno pushes up beside him.

The branches of the Tree of L’Manberg, the platform Wilbur had stood upon with Dream and Schlatt beneath him.

Tommy’s drags himself up, trembling fingers pressing against the snow-covered wooden planks, mouth twisting beneath his mask.

Wilbur and Dream had been here. Just days ago.

It’s not too late yet, he swears to himself, closing his fingers around the snow, feeling the cold prickling against his skin through the glove before it melts, dripping in a small pitter-patter.

He glances up, a crow fluttering down with dark wings and a demanding *craw* as it lands, hopping close, head turning this and there.

“Yeah, yeah.” Techno climbs to his feet, brushing snow away absently and sliding his axe in place on his back. *“We’re working on it,”* he tells the crow, offering his arm to the bird that wastes no time fluttering up, pushing into the fingers that smooth down gently over its head. *“Where’s the old man at?”*

It flutters its wings, walking clumsily up Techno’s arm to settle on his shoulder with a loud *craw*.

Tommy stares at them both.

“You talk bird?” he asks blankly, glancing at Eret who has their eyes closed, hand around her wrist, the black veins thick and blotchy against the paleness of Rose’s skin.

She lies in the snow, the tips of her wings fluttering weakly, eyes staring hollowly into the night sky.

“Angel’s birds are different,” Techno answers dismissively.

“Sure,” Tommy snorts, feeling tired and small where he sits, and he glances up to squint at the tower where cooled lava rocks climbs out shattered windows.

The sky is dark and he wrinkles his nose, the odd silence registering as he looks around them, craning his head all the way back before snapping his attention to Techno.

“The fuck is going on?” he asks, curling his shoulders warily. “Where is everyone?”

Techno ignores him, one hand pressing down against the earpiece, and there’s a sharp whistle in his own that makes him flinch, resisting the urge to pry it out as it tapered off.

“They’ve likely been evacuated,” Eret says as Techno steps away, mouth moving as Tommy glowers at his back.

He glances down at Rose again, finding a bit startled that she’s staring right back at him.

“*Scarlet.*” Her lips barely move but Tommy sees the tear that slowly slips down her cheek, a flower blooming dark from the corner of her mouth, petals spreading out against the red of her lips with a prickle of thorns. “*Scar-let?*” Her voice is weak, wet with a low gurgle.

“She’s fighting it, even now,” Eret comments and Tommy’s tail tightens around his waist as the other steps towards him with a crunch of snow beneath their tall boots. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen someone fight the wither rot the way she has.” Their gloves are back on and Tommy wonders how many would die at Bad’s hands and how many had already faltered to the rot taking root under their skin.

Her fingers twitches against the white of the snow, another wither rose moving beneath her skin before breaking through, wrapping almost delicately around her ear as drops of red slips down to stain the snow.

“It’s a bit of a shame, she wasn’t a bad Hero.”

“I didn’t know her that well.” Tommy shifts uncomfortably. “Were you close?”

He knows Royal and Rose had worked with each other on more than one occasion, but with Eris being the one to twist her to what she’d become-

The world feels ugly, even with the white of the snow that stretches out around them.

“I knew her before she became a Hero,” Eret admits.

The air is cold around them and Tommy tips his head back, closing his eyes, wishing he could remove his mask and breathe in the cold chill of it all.

Weeks without seeing the sky. The moon. The sun. The stars.

“Well.” He opens his eyes, picking out one or two stars visible despite the bright light from the streets before tipping his head to Techno who shakes his head. “Whatever that portal was it threw things off a bit- it’s been two hours since I last had contact with Angel.”

“*Two hours!?*” Tommy scrambles up. “The fuck you *mean* it’s been two hours?” he demands, standing taller than both Eret and Techno on the platform.

Techno gives him a flat look. “It means what I said it means.”

“Fucking magic shit,” Tommy breathes, clenching and unclenching his hands. “Schlatt was on the move-“

“Angel tried pursuing him but he disappeared underground as far as he can tell,” Techno grunts, heaving himself up on the platform and seating himself to Tommy’s right. “It’s likely where they’ve taken Siren as well.”

Wilbur.

Tommy bites down on the inside of his cheek.

“And the other Heroes?” he demands tensely, furrowing his brow and rocking back on his heel. “There should be plenty left that never went to the Pit-“

“Valorant is out of commission,” Techno shrugs. “No one knows where Dream or 404 is-“

“Dream is likely to be with Siren, right?” Tommy interrupts, folding down with his legs in a crisscross, facing the Villain. “404 has been missing for weeks, but I know the dude, he’s likely looking for Dream.”

Techno raises a brow at him.

“They’re-“ Tommy waves a hand. “They’ve got this *thing* going on, doesn’t matter anyway but-“ He slaps both palms on his knees, leaning forward. “McChill- Bad’s got him in the Pit so he’s not going to interfere, Caribou is-“ His fingers dig into his skin. “Well, he’s not a worry and- Rose is...” He glances at her. “So that leaves the Captain? Puffy is- she’s-“

“The Captain is dangerous,” Techno says with a tone that belies his admiration.

Tommy stares at him. “I- yeah?” he mutters out, squinting at the Villain. “She’s Number Three for a reason-“

“You can leave the Captain to me,” Eret interrupts, adjusting their mask, one hand folded behind their back.

“Oh.” Tommy blinks at them. “You mean-“

A look silences him and Tommy shrugs, glancing away, staring out towards the empty pavements, eyes lingering on the red car left behind, the front smashed into a bent metal pole.

“Hey guys- not to interrupt or anything.” Faux Pas trots hurriedly up to them, fox tail swinging freely behind him and a thumb hitched over his shoulder. “I found us a car,” he proclaims. “No need to thank me, I know I know, I’m so handsome and brilliant-“

No one moves and Faux Pas halts, throwing both hands up in the air.

“Or we can just stay here!” he says with clear exasperation, moving to fold his arms only for the crow on Techno’s shoulder to take off in a flutter of feather and a loud screech towards him, forcing the Vigilante to dive with a squawk to avoid it, waving his hands in protest.

“Hey- hey hey hey *lay off!*” He covers his arms with both hands ducking down, swatting desperately as the crow landed at the back of his poncho, picking with a sharp beak and furiously beating wings. “Stop it! *What did I do!?*”

“I thought foxes hunted birds,” Techno leans over to mutter in an undertone and-

Tommy chokes on a laugh, weak and frail in the dark cold world as snow slowly starts falling above them.

On the ground Rose draws one last weak breath, lips-stained pale blue, a flake of white landing delicately on a dark pupil before a wither rose breaks through it, blooming dark in a gentle unfolding of petals.

Chapter End Notes

You guys have been asking for Wilbur, you have been asking for Dream and *I gave you both*. Aren't I just delightful? There was another POV I really wanted to fit this chapter but I guess that one will have to wait for the next one...

Anyway, hello! There was a two hour time jump in this chapter so Tommy is gonna have to figure out just what that entails for everything going on in the next chapter. But he's finally out of the Pit, breathing fresh air for the first time since Warden got him and his mental state is-

He's fine, you guys. Just fine.

Kid's got some fresh cool air to fill his lungs :)

As ever, all my love for you guys. I hope you have a wonderful time, wherever you are out in the world when this chapter finds you<3

I read your comments over and over again and I never get tired of looking at the amazing fanart- each and everyone saved carefully on my phone. Once Hush is done I want nothing more than to print them all so I can to hang on my wall

-

If you're interested there's a [Hush Now Discord](#) that tends to go *brrrrr* with the theories in designated channels and also have a lot of fun chatter and chill people on top of scoops of chaos with my lovely mods<3

There's also a Hush Now Index created by me and Isa, and you can access it in the "Hush Now Index" channel on my server for those of you who are interested! Hella shout-out to Isa for the incredible work she put into it<3 It looks amazing.

You can find me on **tumblr** here: [corpse-art](#)
And I'm also on **twitter** now here: [corpsey_art](#)

I post a one hour countdown on all my social medias for a new chapter update if you're interested in such a thing :)

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DUDES. We have new Hush Now art!! They're all amazing. Go and give them all so much love<3

(And if I ever miss linking your art- pls let me know!! I try to make sure I keep track of everything but I am but human)

[What about, Blade? by MmmGooseFeet](#) art

[Forehead Bump by shadowsails](#) art

[FANART MASTERPOST](#)

Chapter 47

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“I’m fairly certain I’ve been warned against this exact scenario,” Tommy declares, staring at the white van Faux Pas is already hoisting himself into.

“Just get into it,” Techno snorts, clapping his shoulder as he passes him by, and Tommy rocks with the force of it.

The world is cold around him, snow spiralling from the sky, an eerie sort of silence lingering.

A shiver crawls down his spine but he welcomes it, hand raising and thumb tracing down the jaw of the mask on his face, aching to take it off, to breathe in the icy chill.

Eret opens the doors on the back of the van and Tommy watches from the corner of his eyes as Techno has to duck his head to climb inside, rocking the whole thing from the heaviness of his frame, broad shoulders lowering and red cape disappearing inside.

His mouth doesn’t twitch. A part of him feels like it should.

But instead there’s a numbness in his chest as he glances back, to Rose who lies dead in the snow.

Flowers blooming in rot, he thinks a bit morbidly, staring at the black roses, and there’s a brush of distant dark amusement inside of him alongside a pulse of warmth around his wrist.

He takes a step back, twisting around, and he doesn’t give himself time to second guess his decision as he trots his way over to her, one knee sinking into the wet snow.

It takes him a bit of careful manoeuvring to get one arm beneath her lower back and one beneath the bend of her knees, but he manages, hoisting her up and closer to his body with a breath that mists the air through the vents of Siren’s mask.

She’s a limp weight in his arms, skin already turning blue from the cold

The tree of L’Manberg towers white with its spindly branches and he approaches it, sinking to both his knees and propping her up against it. He adjusts her clothes with a brush of his palm before gently placing both her hands to rest on her belly, nudging at her head to prop her chin to rest in the centre of her chest.

He’s stares at her for a moment before straightening up and stepping back.

“*Scarlet.*”

She’d recognised him in those last moments, something lost and vulnerable in her voice, and he remembers the poppy she’d offered him with a wink all those months back, that had rested

in a tall glass of water at his bedside table until the last red petal fell from its neck.

A last glance and he can almost pretend that she's just resting, snowflakes clinging to the pink of her sweater and to the dark petals of the roses blooming from her skin.

This time his shiver has nothing to do with the cold.

-

"So, what's the plan?" Tommy asks as he hoists himself into the van, pulling the door shut behind him. "We lost two hours so- what the fuck is even going on now?"

Techno is seated on the floor, one knee drawn up, axe resting lazily on it, the other stretched out, and Tommy steps over it to drop down opposite him, slouching back against the metal wall.

He stares at Wilbur's brother, daring him to comment, to call what he'd done a *waste of time*, but Techno meets his gaze evenly with those red eyes.

"The million-dollar question right there, folks!" Faux Pas slaps his gloved hands against the steering wheel. "If we're taking votes, I'm down for just getting the hell out of here--"

Tommy twitches, breaking eye contact to pin his gaze into the rear-view mirror.

"How about you shut the fuck up," he bites out, tired and cold where he sits. "You solve *nothing* by running away like a coward."

There's a dull ache in his thigh, from his neck where blood has crusted dark, and the bite in his shoulder prickles distantly with the pull of his skin.

"Oh like *you* did, you mean?" Faux Pas laughs high and fake. "What was it- two months of you disappearing off the map? Quite a bit of running that--"

"Knock it off." Techno knocks the head of his axe against the back of his seat. "We have more important things to deal with when you two arguing like children."

Tommy unwinds his tail from around his midriff, flicking it out to lie limp on the floor of the van with a snort.

"*Child.*" Wilbur's voice, teasing and fond in the back of his mind until Tommy swats at it.

From the corner of his eyes he sees Eret lean over Faux Pas, their voice quiet.

"What happened to everyone?" Tommy decides to ask, focusing back on Techno.

He doesn't know why- can't pinpoint the feeling in his chest, exactly, but-

Techno feels steady in the crumbling world around him and he craves the feeling of one of those heavy hands on his shoulder, against his neck, a reassuring squeeze to let him know that, Techno was there, that he'd promised all would okay, that Wilbur would be saved and-

His chest twists and there's a tightness that restricts his feeling, a feeling of panic he can't allow to latch on and take root as he wrestles desperately against it.

His tail twitches just an inch closer to the leg stretched out on the floor before he catches himself, flexing his fingers deliberately to distract from the, frankly, insane urge to wrap his tail around the man's ankle like a lost little child.

"Evacuated, most likely," Eret answers from the passenger seat, twisting around to peer back at them.

Tommy doesn't miss that one of their hands is resting firmly on Faux Pas' upper arm.

"Code red," Tommy says with a twist of his lips that bare too much teeth.

"That means the main players are going to be left," Techno says and there's something like *satisfaction* in his voice that makes Tommy side-eye him suspiciously.

"Heroes, Villains and Enforcers," Eret agrees, tilting their head thoughtfully.

"And Vigilantes," Faux Pas mutters under his breath.

A crackle in his ear makes Tommy twitch, hand slapping up against it to activate it.

"We have a problem," Angel's voice is tight with something that sends a shiver down his back. *"Apparently,"* he says slowly, danger coiling in his voice. *"Lethe and Judge decided to take things into their own hands and my crows spotted them breaking into Pandora."*

Tommy blinks.

"Are they dumb?" he blurts out, shocked.

"They're going after Nemesis and Jester," Techno grunts, shifting with a baring of tusks in a grimace. "Fools. They're in way over their head."

"I'd ask what their powers are but it won't matter shit once they've stepped onto Pandora grounds. It's gonna drain them fucking dry." Tommy waves a hand. "Horrible feeling really, do not recommend. I'd give their hospitality rating a solid negative-"

His mouth clicks shut as Techno's eyes suddenly pins him in place, a furrow visible in his brows and a steady intensity to his gaze.

"Does it affect you even when you've not bitten someone?"

Tommy hesitates, frowning.

"Dunno," he answers cautiously. "It's not like I've been waltzing in there on the weekly to try it out."

A raised brow.

Tommy gives him a flat look.

“Why the fuck are you looking at me like that for?” he demands. “I don’t give a shit about two Villains who decided to be idiots and wander into Pandora *willingly*, I have more important things to deal with-“

“You’re a Hero, right?” Techno interrupts.

“*Blood God-*“ Phil’s voice is distant crackle in his ear before Techno shifts to lean forward and Tommy can’t help the minute flinch as the Villain’s palm kills his connection with a *click*.

“Here’s the thing, Theseus.” Techno’s gaze pins him in place. “Lethe and Judge are not even supposed to be on the play field. You want to know why?”

“Not particularly,” Tommy wrestles out, pressing his back harder against the van with an awkward laugh that rings rotten. “I’m guessing you won’t give me a choice tho-“

“Lethe and Judge are both kids,” Techno cuts in and Tommy’s mouth clicks shut, eyes widening. “You wouldn’t be a very good Hero if you left them to be killed, hm?” the Villain pushes and-

The irony hits him like a sledgehammer, a wheezy noise caught between his teeth as the back of his head hits cold metal.

“So, what, you want me to go in on the off chance it won’t affect me and then *what?*” he demands disbelievingly because-

There’s exactly two *kids* who Tommy had been introduced to, whose apartment he’d been dragged to, whose *heights* matched Lethe and Judge very fucking *suspiciously*.

Tubbo and Ranboo.

His mouth twists with dislike behind his mask but- *fuck*, he can’t deny that Techno is *right*.

The Heroic thing would be to prioritize them and-

The hand that had curled around the handle of the axe twitches, the surprised expression of Caribou burned into his mind and-

His teeth clenches tight and he jerks his head aside. “Fine,” he bites out. “But I ain’t doing it on my own, I’m not an *idiot*, and I refuse to be kept out of the loop.”

He feels Techno’s eyes on him for a long moment before the Villain eases back, apparently satisfied.

Tommy’s chest knots and prickles with irritation, all too keenly aware that he was being played.

“We have to wait out Schlatt’s next moved anyway, right?” Tommy folds his arms, leaning back, fingers brushing over his own mask in the pocket of the coat in reassurance. “Both Siren and Dream have gone underground along with the bastard.”

“Seems like it.” Techno’s fingers drags down the handle of the axe, giving it an idle spin, red eyes burning into him. “And you’re fast, right? In and out of Pandora should be a child’s play for someone like you.” His mouth curves in challenge with a little tilt of his head. “And you’ll be back before we have time to miss you.”

You fucking manipulative bastard, Tommy thinks with some marvel, mouth stretching up in a grin behind his mask.

On one hand, the last thing Tommy wants to do it take a fucking *detour*:

On the other, he can see the value of it on the off-chance that Jester and Nemesis were still there.

“I’ll come with you,” Eret says from the passenger seat and Tommy’s head jerks up, seeing his eyes reflected back in those dark sunglasses. “I might know a way to get you inside.” A lowering of their head. “And they’re my responsibility anyway.”

Tommy gives them a long look before he shrugs. “Fine with me.” He looks to Techno. “That work for you as well, Blade?”

Approval in the gleam of red eyes.

“Sounds like a plan.”

-

Tommy jumps out of the van, landing easily in the snow and tilting his head up to stare at the depressing building that make up the prison of Pandora in the distance.

Dark tall walls, a box of a prison, the walls thick and looming.

There’s a bridge leading out to it where it stands against a backdrop of dark water lapping up at the shores of its surrounding landmass. It nearly disappears into the dark night sky, like a fucking up depressing void of *unhappiness*.

Tommy’s never liked Pandora. Doesn’t like what it represent. Like a symbol of all the fucking-up shit in the world and the failure of Heroes and what they’re supposed to be.

Techno steps out beside him.

“Don’t do anything *heroic*,” Techno says, tilting his head to look out at the prison beside him. “I still need you back later.”

If Tommy closes his eyes he can almost pretend it’s *care*.

“Worried?” he asks sardonically. “You shouldn’t be, Blade. I’m just breaking into the most secure prison in the world to haul in some naughty children for time-out-“

“*Theseus.*”

“*Blade,*” he mocks back in the same kind of drawl. “I’ll be fine, I have more important shit to deal with after this anyway.” He tilts his head back, baring his teeth behind his mask. “You better find a way to track down Dream and Siren because I’m done with Schlatt’s games.”

The Villain hums, snow crunching beneath heavy boots as they take a step back and-

Tommy’s tail flicks and he lurches forward before he can second guess himself, one hand tangling in red fabric, halting the other midturn.

He straightens his shoulders, turning his head up and meeting the gaze of the man, fabric scrunching in a white knuckled grip.

“I- I fucking *know* we weren’t doing enough as Heroes. We tried but the fucking system was working against us every damn step of the way and- I guess I thought we had more time.” His teeth sinks into the skin on the inside of his cheek with a shake of his head. “It’s a shit excuse, and I wish I knew what the fuck is going on in Dream’s head, but Siren should never have been caught and used like this and-“ The muscles in his shoulders draws tight. “I’m sorry,” he blurts out and his cheeks heats with embarrassment and he lowers his head, unable to meet the man’s gaze. “I’m- really fucking sorry everything went to shit like this.”

There’s a long stretch of silence before Techno shifts and Tommy twitches in surprise as his chin is pushed up.

“It doesn’t matter how good of a Hero you are, Theseus.” Techno’s voice is quiet, a look in his eyes that Tommy can’t quite place when he dares to meet them. “Society isn’t fair and most die terribly. You work within a system of corruption that you, intentionally or not, hold up even as you’re fighting to tear it down.”

“Maybe,” Tommy grimaces. “But I still- I believe that Dream was onto something. That, sometimes change has to come from *within*. You have to give people a chance to change.”

“And if the rot is too deep?” Techno tilts his head an inch. “What if there’s nothing to save.”

Tommy laughs, a quiet vulnerable thing. “I once thought that I wasn’t worth saving,” he admits. “But- Dream proved me wrong.” He shakes his head. “You can think me naïve for it, I don’t care, but I can believe it and admit that I still played a role in how shit went wrong.”

Techno is quite for a moment, considering him where he stands in a masquerade of a person they both love.

“You saved Siren’s life.”

“I did,” Tommy agrees and he meets Techno’s eyes evenly. “And I’m *glad* I did,” he says and it’s such an easy thing to admit, his mouth twitching up behind his mask, something soft. “I’m- really fucking glad I did,” he breathes, wind ruffling the curls of his brown fringe.

It's not too late, he thinks and he has to believe it.

Dream and Wilbur are both alive. Still out there. And- in the grand scheme of things it doesn't matter what becomes of Red Chaos, he just needs them both to be okay.

He'll pay whatever price is necessary.

A snort and then, unexpectedly, there's a heavy hand scuffing over his head, almost like a tousle, gone before he can do much more than jerk in shock.

"Don't get into too much trouble."

And-

It's the same words throws carelessly to him months back, when he'd dragged the Villain home to his empty apartment and sown him up on his couch and-

Stay, a part of him whispers as he watches the snow crunch and Techno duck back into the van. *Don't leave me*.

The doors closes shut, van rumbling to life, and Tommy lifts a hand, pressing his palm flat against his beanie.

"You too," he mutters to disappearing vehicle.

He draws a breath, lets it out in a rush before turning to Eret who'd wandered down to the cliff edge, gold cape fluttering in the breeze, snow spiralling around them and clinging to the golden crown on their head.

"I guess it's just the two of us then!" Tommy raises his hands over his head, folding his fingers together and stretching them out, ignoring the way it pulls at his skin as he ambles closer to his fellow not-quite-Hero. "Got any idea as to how we're supposed to pull off this bullshit mission?"

Eret lowers down on their haunches, gloved fingers brushing over the snow to bare the frozen grass beneath it.

"I might have a way to get us inside," the other says after a moment, glancing back at him. "I have been keeping an eye on the Hero channels."

"Oh yeah, you still have access to those, huh." Tommy drops his arms, rolling his shoulders idly.

"Not for much longer," Eret shakes their head. "Schlatt has called for all Heroes and my absence will be felt."

Tommy hums noncommittally. "So, what's going on that you think we can use?"

"A good portion of the guards in Pandora has been relocated." Tommy steps forward and plops himself down beside the other, letting his legs swing out over the dark water below

them from the cliff edge. “As you saw, several were sent into the Pit.”

“Felt it as well,” Tommy mutters, rubbing absently on a blossoming bruise on his arm where one lucky bastard had gotten a swing in.

“That too,” Eret agrees with amusement that fades with a shake of their head. “If there’s ever a chance to break into Pandora it’s now and with Angel and Blood God drawing attention deeper into the city they’re not gonna be focused on guarding Pandora.”

“Schlatt’s always been a paranoid bastard,” Tommy frowns. “He’ll want his protection near him.”

“Hence why the Heroes have been called in to stay close to him,” Eret agrees. “He’s not taking any chances with Siren.”

“Or himself,” Tommy mutters with a harsh breath. “Well, it gives us some playroom at least, attention will be elsewhere.”

“We just need to act fast,” Eret says, clapping their hands together. “In and out.”

“There’s parts of Pandora that’s protected from the draining effect of the obsidian.” Tommy tugs absently at a piece of his fringe, frowning out at the dark walls. “Where the guards are between their rounds, right?”

“Stay in one long enough and we’ll be able to recover the use of our powers for a bit,” Eret agrees, snow crunching beneath their boots as they shift. “They’re bound to draw a commotion.”

Tommy snorts. “Yeah.” He tips his head, considering the older, because no-fucking way Eret hadn’t volunteered for more than one reason. “So the plan is pretty much- get in, hunt them out, and then get the fuck out of there?”

Eret is silent for a moment before-

“There’s a chance Jester and Nemesis are still in there,” they say finally, tone unreadable.

Called it, Tommy thinks, brushing his fingers to get rid of some snow from his pantleg.

“And there’s an equal chance they’ve been moved,” Tommy points out, dragging one foot up on land and propping his elbow on his knee. “I don’t mind a detour,” he says with a shrug when those glowing eyes flicks down to him. “I owe them one anyway for getting me the fuck out of that mall.”

It’s not exactly true but, fuck it, Tommy will admit he’s more interested in getting Nemesis and Jester out than fucking *Tubbo* and *Ranboo* because the Syndicate is already outnumbered as it is.

And Jester and Nemesis had both been... *helpful*.

“It’s not like we know where Lethe and Judge is anyway, we’ll be crawling through the walls looking for them, might as well keep an eye out for Nemesis and Jester while at it. Would be dumb not to.” It sounds like an excuse, even to his own ears because, hell, he doesn’t even know where he stands anymore.

Eret hums. “You have any of Nemesis blood left?”

“None,” Tommy admits, hand brushing over his mask, where the two pills of Dream’s blood rests securely. “But hey, there’s plenty of powers inside Pandora,” he bares his teeth in a grimace behind his mask. “Might be able to pick something up for the road.”

Eret pushes their sunglasses up and there’s a white shine to their eyes, brilliant in the dark night.

And then their hand slips to grasp something at the back with a rustle of their golden cloak and Tommy tenses, shifting his foot an inch-

But all Eret pulls out is three bottles, the necks caught between their fingers, the blood dark red inside.

“McChill’s,” Eret says, twisting their hand around to give them a study. “I would have gotten more but these were the only bottles I could get my hands on in such a short notice.”

Tommy stares at them, the light of the moon catching in the round glass.

“Damn,” he breathes, taking a step forward. “Holy shit- I didn’t even consider-“ The bottles are twisted around and offered out to him. “Ice powers, huh?” He accepts them gingerly. “It’s such a useful power.” They clink together innocently in his palms before he slides them back, hooking them to his belt. “You- fuck, Eret, this is *golden*. ”

“If you can figure out how to use them,” Eret raises their hand, pulling down their mask to reveal a smile. “I have faith in you.”

Tommy twitches, frowning behind the mask.

He misses the cast of shadow of his hoodie, feeling the cold air against his cheeks.

“Before we go-“ Eret takes a step to him and Tommy forces himself to remain in place as a gloved hand reaches out towards him, fingers brushing against the skin of his neck, and he allows the tip of his head with his heart pounding hard in his chest.

They could kill you. Every inch of his instincts are screaming, tail still behind him. *All they need is a single touch-*

“Let me clean and wrap this up,” Eret mutters, their bare face showing the crease of their brows, the dip of their mouth that reeks of *concern* of all fucking things. “An infection would be the last thing you need to be dealing with.”

The wounds weren’t even that deep, just the price of his powers trying to keep up and failing.

But Eret is already rummaging around to pull out two field compressors that he places in Tommy's palm before getting one of the field saline solution one-use packets and tearing it open.

They pause. "Is this okay?"

Tommy hesitates but gives a small stiff nod. "It's alright," he gets out. "Who knows what kind of crap one could pick up in Pandora."

A hand delicately frames his jaw to tilt it and Tommy's skin crawls at the feeling, focusing on the swab of the gauze pad, old crusted and half-clotted blood wiped away with a sort of familiar clinical work that slowly makes his shoulders to ease down.

"It's quite a remarkable power you gave," Eret murmurs as they work, idly flicking some old blood away from the collar of the blue coat with their pinkie. "To be able to take on any power, to make it your own-" A slow shake of their head. "That's the kind of power most would dream to wield."

Tommy draws his tail up, wrapping it back up around his waist with a flick of the blond tuft.

"It's handy," he agrees awkwardly, unsure what to do with himself with Eret all up in his personal space. "Fucking annoying as well," he huffs, breath coming out in a white mist. "Doesn't really leave much room to experiment since it's so fucking unpredictable."

Those glowing white eyes meets his for a second before Eret focuses back, scraping delicately at an old dried spot that flakes with little tugs of his skin.

"You didn't seem all that hesitant to cut your arm off," they say and Tommy twitches minutely. "Did you know that Blood God's power would heal it back?"

This is the most awkward small talk I've ever been part of, Tommy thinks, staring up at the moon.

"I was gambling on it at least healing it," he mutters, the fingers on his right-hand curling against his palm, tucked away, hidden.

You should be thankful I let you keep it, the Blood God rumbles and it feels distant, almost sleepy, an ache to his teeth and ringing in his right ear. ***For now,*** the God tacks on almost absently.

Taking gifts back is considered bad eti-qu-ette, Tommy thinks back, tracking a snowflake as it makes a spin, left to the whims of the world.

So is stealing.

My bad. Tommy forces as much dryness as humanly possible into the drawl of the words. *Next time I bite someone I'll make triple sure there isn't a fucking God just casually lurking in the back of their head.* He frowns. *Actually, can I ask you something?* Tommy ventures hesitantly.

You can ask, Blood God allows with a warning note that tastes metallic of blood on his tongue.

I've been using Dream's blood for years, and he had that weird- His hand twitches, to gesture for the back of his neck before he catches himself. *You know, that mark, and- I get that it was some weird bastardized thing but shouldn't there have been something like, well, you?*

A God Mark made by human hands does not a Vessel make and even so, very few Gods remain that have enough power to influence you humans, the Blood God answers after a long moment and a splitting headache explodes behind his eyes, forcing them away from the brightness of the moon to stare out at Pandora while fighting watering eyes. ***I'm the exception, not the rule, and there's limits to what even I can do.*** Something thick and heavy like pride. ***There is only one who stands as my equal and it is rarer yet that She concerns herself with you humans.***

Tommy distantly wonders how rude it would be to ask a god how he could know for *sure* but resists.

He has a feeling the god wouldn't take too kindly to it.

Limits? he asks instead, raising one hand to dig the heel of his palm into his brow, distantly feeling a hand grasp his bicep, steadying him with words that are nothing but a buzz.

I am bound to the limits of your human flesh. His teeth clenches together, nausea crawling thick in the back of his throat. ***I cannot make you into something you are not, whelp***

Tommy feels something burst, wetness dripping from his nose, iron that stain the skin of his lips behind the mask, air whistling through his teeth.

Throughout history you humans have condemned us in the same breath you've pleaded for our mercy. And for a moment, a second, a fleeting brush of time, he wonders if he imagines the touch of bitterness before it's swallowed up by the raw all-consuming dark satisfaction from the god as his vision spots black. ***And yet, you always come crawling back to us in the end.***

Tommy jerks, gasping for breath, sucking is greedily down his aching lungs as the world rushes back to him, freezing in place because-

There's a palm resting against the back of his head, forehead rested against a collarbone, one arm wrapped around him to keep him steady as he trembles, sweat on his brow and back sending an icy chill through him as wind brushes past them both.

He groans wetly, blood on his lips and mouth tasting of iron.

"You back with me?" Eret's voice comes too close to his ear and he jerks, only to be steadied as he draws back on unsteady legs, muscles drawing tight until he's slowly released. "Red-"

"I'm fine," Tommy bites out in frustration, shaking his head that's pounding. "Fucking- I just needed a moment."

He meets Eret's glowing gaze and a strange feeling of shame bubbles up inside of him.

"It won't compromise the mission," he swears, the heel of his palm rubbing roughly against his temple.

"That's the least of my concern." Eret's brow is furrowed. "No one would blame you for tapping out for a moment to breathe, Red."

I would blame myself, Tommy thinks heavily, emotions heavy and leaden inside his chest.

His fingers curls tight, lips wobbling behind his mask as he lowers his head, staring into the dark waters.

"Let's just get this over with," Tommy bites out. "The quicker we're inside, the quicker we're gonna be out and move onto actual important shit."

There's a moment of silence and then-

"You're a good Hero," Eret murmurs and Tommy allows them to step closer, tilting his head as the other tears the back of the fist compress off, allowing it to be pressed over the wound on his throat. "Never forget that."

"You're a good Hero," Nemesis had told him softly. *"For what it's worth, I've always liked that about you."*

Am I though? Tommy wonders a bit emptily, teeth digging into the inside of his cheek. *And what the fuck even makes a good Hero in the first place?*

The world feels like a mess and he can't help feel like he's making an even bigger one out of things.

But if there's something he can be sure about it's that, Dream wouldn't fault him for getting Tubbo and Ranboo out of Pandora, and he can cling to that at least.

It's the right thing to do. He raises his head. *And if we can get Jester and Nemesis at the same time, even better. Schlatt needs to be stopped. Everything else can be dealt with after.*

A cold wind rustles Siren's trench coat.

"This is gonna be a shitshow, isn't it?" Tommy says finally, reaching for one bottle and holding it up to catch the shine of the moon in the glass.

He pops it open with a press of his thumb.

"You said it, not I," Eret says with a laugh that's surprisingly warm in the cold night.

Tommy pushes the bottom of the mask up just enough to catch the neck of the bottle between his teeth and-

He hesitates for a single moment, glancing at the other who had politely turned away the moment he moved his mask.

Tall.

A crown on their head.

A want to be King.

A quick in and out, Tommy tells himself firmly. And then- I'm coming for you both. Wilbur. Dream. Just-

He closes his eyes and throws his head back, letting the thick blood spill down his throat with a shiver as something icy spread through his limbs, spanning out from the very depth of his being.

Just wait for me, alright?

-

Warden steps down to the water, lowering himself down, a gold clad hand pressing against the cold ice.

He raises his head, tracing the narrowly made path that leads out over the tumultuous dark water, all the way to the island of Pandora.

His creation.

Chapter End Notes

tommy: this is be a quick in and out, just a small detour-
warden: bet

those who follow me on twitter might have seen this already but- i'm adjusting hush to be four arcs instead of three because, well, there's still a lot left on this journey of ours and i'm terribly good at underestimating myself (ah, to think, i once thought i could pull hush off in less than 100k- those naïve young days). so i'll let you guys know when we reach the end of arc three :)

until then-

much love for all the love and support, it truly does make my day

hope you're having a good one wherever you are out there in the big wide world<3

-

If you're interested there's a [Hush Now Discord](#) that tends to go *brrrr* with the theories in designated channels and also have a lot of fun chatter and chill people on top of scoops of chaos with my lovely mods<3

There's also a Hush Now Index created by me and Isa, and you can access it in the "Hush Now Index" channel on my server for those of you who are interested! Hella shout-out to Isa for the incredible work she put into it<3 It looks amazing.

You can find me on **tumblr** here: [corpse-art](#)

And I'm also on **twitter**:

main: [corpsey_art](#)

alt: [corpseyreads](#)

I post a one hour countdown on all my social medias for a new chapter update if you're interested in such a thing :)

-

DUDES. We have new Hush Now art!! They're all amazing. Go and give them all so much love<3

(And if I ever miss linking your art- pls let me know!! I try to make sure I keep track of everything but I am but human)

[The Evolution of HN!Tommy_by blissfali](#) art

[I Know You by 652Phantom](#) art

[The Syndicate by 652Phantom](#) art

[FANART MASTERPOST](#)

Chapter 48

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

"This must have been where they went inside," Eret muses and Tommy is busy rubbing his cold hands together.

The ice prickles and stings, somehow worse in his right hand, the *piglin* hand.

He flexes his fingers discreetly as he leans forward to peer at whatever got Eret's attention, blinking at the little flowers blooming in the snow against the obsidian, revealing an opening into pandora.

Tommy crouches down, fingers brushing small white delicate petals, eyes lingering on the little green leaves that fold out from their delicate stem.

His heart aches for Clementine.

"How in the world did they get inside?" he asks, squinting at the barely visible hole, carved strangely, as if through butter, just big enough to allow a certain tall someone to slide in feet first.

Perhaps it was for the better Techno hadn't come along.

Tommy tilts his head, trying to picture the large piglin hybrid squeezing into the hole-

"Lethe's powers no doubt," Eret says, lowering themselves to one knee beside him, gloved fingers brushing thoughtfully along the rounded hole in the obsidian. "The flowers are Judge's."

Tommy yanks his hand back.

"What kind of powers does he have to be able to make a hole in *obsidian* of all fucking things?" Tommy asks in morbid curiosity.

Eret's hand pauses, their head tilting thoughtfully.

"I think it could best be described as *void bubbles*," they answer after a long moment. "He can expand them from the tips of his fingers and they eat through all materials, like small black holes."

"The fuck-"

"He's a hybrid so I wouldn't bite him if I were you."

Tommy gives them a mildly offended look. "I wasn't planning to," he mutters, lips curling at the thought. "What do you take me for? I have standards."

Eret leans to bump their shoulders together and Tommy startles at the touch, twitching back, skin burning uncomfortably. "I didn't mean it like that."

Tommy grunts noncommittally.

"Let's just get this show on the road."

He presses a hand into the cold snow and pushes in feet first, careful not to touch any of his bare skin against the black walls that closes in around him as he curls his shoulders tight against his ears, breathing out with a huff as he dropped down with a dusty *thud* and reflexive bend of his knees.

Tommy moves out of the way, eyes scanning the dimly lit room as he unwound his tail from around his waist with a flick as Eret dropped out behind him.

They wince.

"I'll never get used to this," Eret breathes harshly, hand rubbing uncomfortably over his chest.

Tommy can already feel the pull off McChill's power, the icy spread in his chest wavering and draining away as he gives himself an uncomfortable shake but- there's no heavy weight spreading through him, no tiredness that tugs at his limbs.

Instead the cold merely disappears, leaving him standing with a swish of his tail, the heat around him a comfortable change from the icy winds outside.

He knows the heat would get overbearing in time but- it's nice for now, heating the depth of his being.

The other times he'd visited Pandora he'd been jacked up on Dream's power, taking pills at a more regular pace to compensate for the drain of the obsidian around him.

His cheeks heat behind his mask- realising he'd probably been better off just not taking any at all unless needed.

"Any ideas?" Tommy asks, deciding he was better off not lingering on it and making his way to the door. "Or we just picking a direction and going for it?"

He eyes the heavy thing- made of diamonites, because wood would have been dumb inside a building containing a *shit ton* of lava and normal steel would conduct enough heat to burn palms clean off.

It's an ugly strange green colour against the obsidian walls that stretches thick around them.

Everything about Pandora is ugly.

"I feel like going right," Eret hums, stepping up beside him.

He grabs the handle and shoves it with a rough grinding slide into the obsidian wall, wincing at the noise.

“Might as well do this fast, huh,” Tommy huffs. “No way we’ll be able to stay under radar for long.”

He leans out, peering left and then right down an empty stretch of corridor.

“The lower levels are going to be largely understaffed,” Eret says in an undertone. “If they’re smart they’ve put the main staff on the prisoners with powers ranked as deadly.”

Tommy gives them a flat look. “You mean like the majority of prisoners here?” There’s no windows in Pandora and the feeling of being closed in makes his tail flick, the hair at the back of his neck rising uncomfortably even as he pushes away at it. “If Nemesis and Jester are still here they’re gonna be on those levels anyway so the low staffed ones won’t be much use to us.”

“Will make it easier for us to get through them and hopefully intercept Judge and Lethe.”

“How optimistic of you,” Tommy snorts. “Sure, right, so- we let’s just go then?”

Eret claps his shoulder and Tommy twitches, muscles wiring tight beneath their touch.

“Lead the way,” they tell him and-

That’s not what he wants, is it?

It’s a realisation that settles far too heavy inside of him, the strange ache for Techno to have stayed, to have led confidently, letting Tommy melt into his shadow, at his side.

He steps right, blindly, grasping for the persona of Siren like a child grabbing a comfort blanket with a straightening of his shoulders and clenching of his jaw.

I’ve got this, he tells himself.

For Wilbur.

For Dream.

He glances at Eret as they fall at his side, a step back, the golden crown on their head shining oddly from the purple that crawls through the obsidian with a dull glow, little particles of it drifting in the air.

At least they won’t be able to use their powers on me in here, Tommy thinks with a harsh breath.

-

A mockery of dark amusement roots from the depth of his being from the God inside of him.

-

Warden's hand drags over dark obsidian walls, feeling the pull of his powers for a moment before the gold that dons him nullifies the effect with a hum, a dull glow of purple flaring to life to settle over his armour, gleaming at the end of the dark corridor he halts in.

His head tilts, listening, before turning down right with a low rustle of his armour.

He doesn't hurry.

He doesn't need to.

I shouldn't be here, a very distant part of him notes but it's secondary to the mission and the strain of humanity inside of him that begs to hurry.

Patience.

Warden knows it intricately and he cloaks himself in it.

There's no other option.

Not after coming this far.

One hand rises to grasp the handle of his trident, right foot touching down, bracing it forward and-

The metal buries into the chest of the Enforcer as they turn the corner in a hurry, eyes barely having time to widen as Warden's left foot presses down, forcing it deeper with his next step, past skin and flesh and bones into soft organs as their lips parts, blood bubbling and dribbling down their chin.

He twists the trident down and they land limp on the floor where he steps down on their back to brace himself before tearing the prongs out of their back with a wet drag.

7 seconds.

He keeps the trident in his hand as he keeps advancing in a slow and steady pursuit.

This time you can't hide from me Red Chaos. You will lead me to Jester and then I'll put an end to this all myself, as is my duty.

Sam's grip tightens around the golden handle.

I won't let anyone else be hurt because of you.

-

"Pandora wasn't always a superpower prison," Eret says as Tommy peers around a corner, and he can't help but feel like the other looks rather unruffled to be walking around the most secure prison in the world.

Tommy feels strangely disconnected from it all as he stares blankly down the empty corridor, brow furrowed and a nagging sense of *off-ness* plaguing him.

It all feels too *easy*.

Even with the riot down in the Pit, whatever the hell had happened to have lava spill down the Hero Tower, the eerie silence of L'Manberg and snow spiralling from the dark sky-

"What was it then?" he asks, mostly to distract himself, Eret following at his heel as he steps unsurely out to guide them blindly deeper into the prison.

At least he hopes he's getting them deeper.

Fuck if he knows shit all about what he's doing.

It would have really fucking handy if you left some flowers or something for me to follow, he thinks mulishly.

He resists the urge to hurl a rock down the next turn that's just as empty.

Mostly because there's no rocks *to be* hurled.

For the first time he finds himself hoping there's Enforcers ahead, any sign of life, but instead there's just more cells, as empty as the next one when he picks a random one to slide back the hutch and-

"It was originally built as a place of protection for the King of L'Manberg during hours of crisis. Or so the rumours go."

Tommy pauses.

"The fucking *what* of L'Manberg?"

"King," Eret repeats, hands clasped behind their back as they lean forward to peer into the empty cell beside him. "Before we had a President, we had a King."

Tommy gives him a long look.

"You mean that fucker that does absolutely shit all but fawn about the latest hit-Hero."

The lines of Eret's face pulls, telling of the smile behind their mask.

"*That* President, indeed."

"Maybe a King would have been more useful," Tommy snorts, abandoning the cell to continue onwards. "I can't stand politicians. Always talking out of their asses and promising shit they won't lift a finger to actually *do*." He remembers, distantly, one of the President speeches he'd watched on a television through a show window.

It had been all talk about solving the *poverty crisis*. He'd been voted in for eight years and the division between the poor and rich of L'Manberg remained just as shitty.

Things hadn't started to really change until Schlatt stepped into power, Tommy had to give him that credit, and even then it remained fucked-up ten ways to Sunday with those rich living in close proximity of the Hero Tower and in the protection of their Heroes.

Eat the rich, Tommy remembers Schlatt, a young fresh newly minted Number One Hero, the name *Judge* discarded and his own name worn with pride, his face bared for the world to see.

And then he'd turned out to be just as corruptible, just as susceptible to bribes. His own tower built, an obnoxious thing with money that could have been used for *anything* else.

He'd seen the first building stones of it years ago while hanging around outside a store for Dream to pick up some new books and he remembers the deep rooted disgust that had crawled through him while people fawned.

"Everyone knows that the true power of L'Manberg lies with the Number One Hero," Eret says and-

Tommy grunts noncommittally because-

That wasn't true either, or Dream would have been able to do more without meeting resistance around every fucking corner.

It all came back to the Hero commission, it's power of the ranks of Heroes and messed up shit behind the scenes, supported, no doubt, by money from all sorts of politicians and rich assholes wanting the illusion of safety by having Heroes at their beck and call.

Tommy's not stupid.

There's a reason why Dream had met resistance whenever he wanted to interfere in shit in the lower districts, far from the spiralling white Hero Tower.

They'd done their best to work around it, but it had been exhausting, and Tommy had sat outside more than his share of meeting rooms while Dream got chewed out for whatever under the guise of pretty words.

Exhaustion had painted deep bags beneath his mentor's eyes and Tommy had resented it even when he did his best to look through papers for any sort of leeway and ducked out on more than one mission that wasn't sanctioned by the Hero commission.

Those had been the best and worst.

The world is an ugly place.

"It must be something, to stand at the top of the world," Eret says and a strange note creeps into their voice, the back of Tommy's neck prickling uncomfortable. "What was it like?"

Tommy's fingers drag against dark obsidian, the tips of his gloves brushing purple particles in a swirl.

He hopes they aren't toxic.

He hopes Wilbur, in all his shitty non-armour wearing glory wasn't so stupid to not have a decent filtering system in his mask, at least.

"In what way?" he asks warily. "It was a shit ton of paperwork, if you like that kind of stuff."

"You know what I mean."

"I don't, in fact," Tommy mutters, pausing and staring at the flat stone elevator ahead. "You don't happen to have some access codes to that thing?"

Eret tilts their head and Tommy's skin prickles uncomfortably, the heat a thing that soaks into his bones, sweat dripping down his back.

He adjusts his backpack with a tug in a fruitless attempt to get some air in the space between it and his skin.

"I don't, but I might know a way to get some."

And-

Tommy shifts surreptitiously to put more space between them, a sinking feeling in his stomach where he stands at the crossroad of empty hallways in the most well-guarded prison in the world.

The golden ring that hangs over his heart rests warm against his skin as his palm brushes down against it, the feather soft against his skin.

Only a fool choses trust, the Blood God rumbles in the depth of his mind, his amusement a rotten thing that tastes like acid and blood on his tongue.

Oh shut up, Tommy thinks back with a grimace. *I could just be overthinking it.*

You don't believe that yourself, the god mocks him with an ache that rattles his teeth.

Tommy can't exactly deny that.

It's all too fucking convenient.

But- Nemesis was also Eret's sister, who they had expressed a vested interest in getting back. Was it *really* that odd that they'd done the research and put in the work to get her out of Pandora once the Pit had worked its distraction?

Tommy breathes out on a harsh huff, glancing at Eret whose thumbs are tapping away at their phone.

They've helped me so far, he tells himself.

It's a weak sort of comfort.

He slouches to rest his weight against the wall, head tipping against the obsidian with a dull *thud*.

Why are you with Techno anyway? he asks, mostly to distract himself as he watches Eret from the corner of his eyes. *You're this big bad God and you're just- hanging about in some dude's brain. That's a bit weird, man, I'll be honest with you.*

A strange feeling stretches in his chest from the Blood God, almost prideful.

He's my Vessel, the God answers and there's only a faint prickle of pain behind his eyes this time which- *fucking wanker.* **He kills in my name, and in return, I grant him the powers he needs to protect that which is his.**

Tommy frowns, mulling the words over.

But why accept is in the first place? he wonders curiously. *You wanted nothing to do with me, even with you rudely attaching yourself to me, which, anyone ever tell you about mixed messages BG- can I call you BG? Blood God is such a mouthful-* Tommy doesn't wait for an answer. *So tell me, BG- there must have something about him that made him, well, worthy?*

Careful, Whelp. The pain that explodes behind his eyes makes them water, jaw clamping down to catch a whimper, a hissed breath of pain escaping through his teeth as he breathes out with a shiver. **I don't tolerate disrespect.**

Noted, Tommy thinks, blinking painfully to rid of his blurry vision.

... I will allow it, Blood God says with dark satisfaction that curls like a cat behind his ribs. **But only here, in your mind.**

Much obliged, Tommy thinks just a tad drily as the pain eases to a dull throb. *So?* he ventures bravely.

You wonder what drew me to him when you are drawn in much the same way, the Blood God's voice is an all consuming thing, terrifying in the way it drowns out his thoughts in the sanction of his own mind. **Do not try to deny it, child, your heart and thoughts are bare to me as long as you wear my brand.**

Never asked for it. Tommy curls the fingers on his right hand tight, knuckles pressing against the leather.

Such is the price of theft and sacrifice, Blood God rumbles with a rattle of his bones he's surprised Eret can't hear. **There are those who would pay a heavy weight in blood to be in my mere presence. You shouldn't be so quick to dismiss the prestige I've bestowed upon you with my mark.**

You're avoiding the question, Tommy thinks ruthlessly, uninterested in going down that path of argument.

A snort, heavy and inhuman, like that of a large beast.

You know the answer already, Whelp. Tommy feels the God draw back, like a slither in his mind with the fading presence. **All you have to do is look deep inside of you.**

The brand around his wrist burns white hot around his wrist.

Wake me up if something interesting happens, would you? I wouldn't want to miss out on the entertainment that's sure to come.

One last flicker of dark amusement and then his mind was blessedly his again.

Tommy twitches, tail flicking in agitation.

"Fucker," he huffs. *"Rude bitchless wanker-"*

"Red?"

His head snaps up, embarrassment colouring his cheeks red behind his mask at the sight of Eret's furrowed brows and concern.

"Ignore me." Tommy waves a hand. "I was having an- *internal dialogue* that went off-track."

Eret's brows shoots up.

"... I see," they say in the kind of tone of voice that really meant *I'm questioning your sanity* which-

Relatable, to be honest.

And entirely fair.

"Oh fuck off," Tommy huffs, pushing off the wall. "You figure out the elevator?"

They twist the screen around, showing off a row of numbers.

"We've got an in."

Anticipation stirs in Tommy's chest. "We're going to the upper levels then."

"Straight into the thick of it," Eret agrees, removing their sunglasses, eyes glowing white. "And if we're lucky, to Nemesis and Jester."

-

"You really picked a spot," Techno grunts, hauling himself over the edge with a twist to seat himself beside the other.

"Gotta admire the view while it's still here."

The city of L'Manberg rises behind them, Pandora in front of them.

A wing stretches out, shielding him from the snow spiraling from the dark sky.

"Food?" Phil asks, offering a styrofoam box. "I picked up a portabella burger for you."

The scent makes his stomach rumble and Techno takes it gratefully, prying it open and going immediately for a handful of fries.

"Seems a bit risky sending him into Pandora with a guy who plays both sides," Phil comments idly before biting down on his chicken burger, the fried shell crunching.

"He'll be fine," Techno grunts, flipping a fry into his mouth. "Eret needs him alive and Theseus is clever. I don't think they're going to do anything yet anyway, the timing is wrong, and they want Nemesis out of Pandora."

Phil's shifts, the wing wrapping closer to drag him into the fold of it.

Or rather, he makes an attempt of it.

Techno knows the exact moment Phil loses track of all thoughts of the mission, concern furrowing his brow, the emotion naked in his eyes to read as his head snaps towards him.

A keen studious glance before Phil leans closer, shoulder pressing against his in an offering of support while also thieving a fry.

"Bruh, you have your own," Techno splutters. "Why are you stealing my hard-earned fries, *Philza*."

"How are you holding up?" Phil asks, stealing one more, making eye contact as he bites down at it.

Techno gives him a dry look before letting out a heavy snort. "Been better," he allows here, with just Phil to bear witness to his weakness. "Things are more complicated than I want them to be."

"So they are," Phil sighs. "Anything in particular on your mind, mate?"

Theseus, he thinks and then promptly grimaces.

Chat titters in amusement.

Aww

Look at him

Getting soft in his old age-

I'm only twenty-one, he thinks back with a mental roll of his eyes. And I'm not getting soft, he tacks on belatedly.

We believe you

We only live in your mind after all

It's a bit crowded

Could do with some decorating

Been awfully morose lately

Wilbur made it better

I miss him

Same man

Sobbing

It's been too long

Far too long-

Operation: Saving Private Brother before we all lose our collective minds

L

Too late

You guys had minds to loose???

"I don't like this cat and mouse game," he says, ignoring Chat quickly derailing into nonsense squabbling. "Schlatt is after something and he's determined to play the long game if he can get his hands on it. He's being cautious, it's not his usual style."

"You think Red is a distraction?"

Techno considers it but ultimately shakes his head. "He wants Theseus, that much is certain, but I'm getting less certain about what exactly his plan for him and Wilbur is, and how Dream plays into it all."

Phil studies him. "You think Schlatt is luring Red to do something."

It's not a question.

"I'm *considering* it," Techno admits with a rough exhale. "We're being led around and, as much as I hate to admit it, we need Jester." A crow squawks indignantly behind them. "Your crows are good eyes but we need Slimecicle and he won't comply without Jester." He bares his tusks. "Schlatt was smart to go after him first."

Phil hums, feathers brushing his cheek.

“You’ve kept up the transformation for too long,” his friend remarks, abruptly flipping the end of his wing up the tip of his snout.

“I’ve kept it up for longer,” Techno grumbles but obligingly closes his eyes.

It takes him a moment but soon the familiar hissing of his power fills the room as muscles and bones shifts inside his skin, his body healing itself in the same breath it tore itself apart, becoming less piglin with a roll of his shoulders as he settled back into the half-and-half amalgamation his powers allowed.

Tension he hadn’t been aware of bleeds away from his shoulders with a low groan.

“You just don’t like it when I remind you of how short you are,” he says without opening his eyes, allowing himself to bask in it for a moment in the stillness of it all.

“At least I’m not being used as a meeting spot in crowds for others to find each other.”

Techno tips his head to shoot him an indignant look. “That was *once*-“

“That you know of,” Phil laughs, reaching to snag a cup with plastic lid and straw, sipping obnoxiously at it. “She was quite grateful, kept thanking her *Hero*-“

Techno swipes a feather with tug and Phil squawks, swatting at him.

“Hey! Leave those alone, I’m losing enough of them already fretting over you and Wil.”

“You’re gonna get bald spots if that’s the case, *old man*-“

The elbow in his ribs are well worth it, Phil’s cackling laugh a balm to his soul.

“You’re such a little shit,” Phil shakes his head fondly. “You and Wil both, I don’t know who is worse.”

A beat, where they both exchange a look.

“Okay, that was a lie,” Phil admits, the smile fading on his face and he sighs, rubbing a palm against his cheek as he leant forward, propping his elbow on his knee. “Even as teenagers you were the more responsible one.”

“Someone had to be,” Techno says quietly, chest twisting. “He’s three years older and he’d *still* go about joking that we were twins because we were born on the same day.”

“That’s Wil for you alright,” Phil says with a helpless sort of love and-

Techno studies him, the crowfeet by his eyes, pale blond hair loose and brushing his jawbone, deep shadows beneath his eyes from lack of sleep.

He looks down at the styrofoam container and the wrapped portabella mushroom burger.

He hesitates.

“Do you think-“ He pauses, considering his words carefully. “Do you think Tommy had anything to do with what happened?”

Phil glances at him, his eyes blue, just like the kid.

It stirs an odd kind of guilt in his chest.

“I don’t know,” Phil says with heavy honesty. “I really don’t.” He sighs. “Whatever was between him and Wil- I don’t think he’d deliberately hurt Wil, or perhaps I just want to believe that for Wil’s sake if nothing else.” His brow dips, a distant look in his eyes as he looks towards Pandora. “Maybe he was used as bait, or maybe he’s innocent and the timing of his disappearance was just convenient.”

“Wilbur wouldn’t have been out there on his own if it wasn’t for him.”

“Wilbur has gone off on his own more times than I can count,” Phil shakes his head. “He’s always been a free spirit, doing things his own way.” A soft look. “Even as a child he couldn’t be contained. The two of you were out of the house more times than in it.”

“... Remember when he came home covered in mud from head to toe and you had to hose him off in the yard?”

Phil throws his head back with a laugh, snow spiraling and his wings rustling in the breeze that swirls past them. “As indignant as a wet cat.”

“A cat suits him,” Techno grunts, freeing half of his burger with a crinkle of paper. “Should get him some ears for next Christmas.”

Only weeks ago he’d had his burger stolen by the feral raccoon child Wilbur had brought home and his heart feels heavy in his chest- recalling the puffed cheeks of the child scrambling to hide behind Wilbur who’d laughed, head thrown back, the joy bare and warm to be seen.

It had been such a rare moment of something he’d missed, more than he was willing to ever admit to his brother.

The bun is a big squished, and it’s not quite warm anymore, but the taste of it still makes him groan with satisfaction when he bites down.

Phil’s right leg swing idly beside his, wing never moving from its protective fold around him.

-

Tommy doesn’t see Eret’s lips move, doesn’t hear the shout of warning, but he sure as *fuck* sees the gold that suddenly fills up the reflection of those dark sunglasses.

Panic crawls ugly and thick up his throat to choke the air out of his lungs as the Villain lurches forward before Tommy’s thoughts can get in sensible order and make himself *move*.

Fingers wraps around his ankle in a painfully familiar unforgiving grasp, clenching down tight and yanking his feet from beneath him and out of the reach of Eret's hand, dragging him bodily off the moving platform as he twists instinctively to slide the last bit to just barely avoid being squished.

His thoughts are an ugly mess of static noise as he hits the ground, rolling over to his back only to freeze, Eret's voice disappearing, cut off from the obsidian swallowing them up, leaving Tommy alone and petrified.

The three golden points of the trident are close enough to gouge out his eyes at one wrong movement, his breath tapering into a painful wheeze in his too tight chest, eyes drifting up at to the dark visor with a tremble that runs through his body as he stares up at the Warden.

At *Sam*.

Chapter End Notes

if you see any mistakes, no you didn't. my brain is fried and i need to go sleep because i have work in -checks time- way too soon

did my best to get it all together (thank you, dewdrop, for getting me through the last bit despite your long shower hours/aff)

... okay, i gave myself five minutes to write something more engaging here but my mind is white noise so-

hope you're having a good one, wherever you are out there and see you next chapter<3

-

If you're interested there's a [Hush Now Discord](#) that tends to go *brrrr* with the theories in designated channels and also have a lot of fun chatter and chill people on top of scoops of chaos with my lovely mods<3

There's also a Hush Now Index created by me and Isa, and you can access it in the "Hush Now Index" channel on my server for those of you who are interested! Hella shout-out to Isa for the incredible work she put into it<3 It looks amazing.

You can find me on **tumblr** here: [corpse-art](#)

And I'm also on **twitter**:

main: [corpsey_art](#)

alt: [corpseyreads](#)

I post a one hour countdown on all my social medias for a new chapter update if you're interested in such a thing :)

-

DUDES. We have new Hush Now art!! They're all amazing. Go and give them all so much love<3

(And if I ever miss linking your art- pls let me know!! I try to make sure I keep track of everything but I am but human)

[irony by 652Phantom](#) art

[hush now spread by WinteryyH](#) art

[right behind you by NoasTea](#) art

[FANART MASTERPOST](#)

Chapter 49

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy's breath is nothing short of a small wheeze through his teeth, not daring to move, his muscles locked tight in place as he stares up at the Villain.

There's no face to be seen, just that fucking dark visor, unforgiving in its judgement.

"Red Chaos." The words are short, distant, almost *rigid* in their delivery, and Tommy forces his chest to expand, to draw air that expands them with a quiver as the man makes no move to pierce him where he lies.

Not *yet*.

The very tips of his fingers twitches against the obsidian floor, swallowing as he stares up at the *goldgoldgold* of the Warden's armour, a strange purple glow to the sheen of it that makes his instincts itch and shy and *want* all at the same time.

He finds it hard to look away from it, but he forces his vision steady on the visor even as something in the back of his mind *keens* in protest, jaw set tight behind Siren's metal mask.

"Warden," he echoes back through clenched teeth, sweat beading on the back of his neck.
"Fancy seeing you here."

The man's hand is curled tight around the long golden handle of the trident, knuckles pressing hard up against dark gloves, the only give away of humanity behind the armour and mask.

He swallows, his mouth dry.

"You-" His mind feels empty of words, of clever distractions and biting jabs- like a gaping terrified void that won't let him *think*. "You come here often?" he manages to crack out, fumbling to grasp for sanity when everything inside of him claws to *get away*.

It's a cacophony of instincts rising to prick at his skin, the phantom itch of wings trying to mantle on his back, of ears that won't fold back, the tusks aching in his mouth and tail drawing closer with a scraping noise against the stone that echoes too loud in his ears.

The Warden shifts, the free hand grasping lower on the trident, stepping closer, not letting it move an inch as he lowers himself down, looming above him in a way that makes him flinch, shrinking on himself with a static catch of his breath that he *hates*.

Weakweakweak-

His eyes itches, dry, not daring to blink as a hand with plates of gold on the back of it reaches out, wrapping around his throat, tightening with a creaking of leather.

“You are going to help me.”

He feels like he’s going insane.

“Help you?” Tommy chokes out as a thumb presses down against the pulse on his neck, shame wiring hot and violent through him because- it’s pounding fast and hard inside his chest, the jackhammer beats of a terrified bunny, so easily given away.

Maybe it’s for the better that he can’t see Sam’s face behind the Warden’s visor.

He doesn’t know if he could handle it.

“Jester is inside these walls.” A shiver crawls up his back, something like nausea clawing up his throat, iron on his tongue and leaden terror threatening to swallow him whole. “Caught because of you.”

He feels like a mouse dangling in the paws of the hunting cat above its open fanged mouth.

The four walls of his cell, the weakness potion, the scent of *rot* from his foot-

“Tell me where Jester is.”

He doesn’t want to be here.

Tommy has never wanted to be anywhere else more badly, praying for the grinding of stone, the lowering of the elevator, for someone, anyone to get him the *fuck* away.

Because-

The thing is-

Jester might not be inside Pandora at all.

How the fuck is *Tommy* supposed to know? The Syndicate seemed confident as fuck that Siren had been moved or Techno would have been right here, of that Tommy does not doubt. But Nemesis and Jester were still up in the air.

The Warden-

Sam.

Seemed confident enough but he’d also been fucking confident Tommy knew something when he *didn’t*.

“I don’t know.”

The sound and feel of his own bones breaking, shifting beneath his skin, twisted only to be repaired again and again and ***again***.

“I don’t fucking know!”

Resentment, anger, fear- a rotten concoction of feelings that misaligns inside of him with instincts that doesn't agree, the fingers on his right hand twitching with twisting of his lips that bares the small tusks beneath his mask and-

"And what," he manages to get out, "if we don't find him."

"I think you and I both know what that means for you," the Warden says, metallic through the voice changer and eerily calm in its condemnation as the fingers around his throat slides lower, settling over the soft spots on either side of his windpipe, spanning like claws with the way the tips of his fingers sink into his flesh and-

Tommy remembers the soft tipping of Sam's mouth with the green beanie being crammed down his head, the scent of the warm foods in the plastic bags dangling from the tips of his fingers and Fran's tail thumping against the wooden floor in the small café where he'd met Wilbur.

"You'll always have a place here."

The last words as he left the café behind in a fool's chase for his mentor.

"No matter what."

Liar, Tommy thinks with a clenching of his teeth, staring at the reflection of himself in the dark visor and-

It's not Red Chaos that stares back at him but Siren and-

His head aches, a wobbly kind of feeling, followed by an eerie sort of quiet as he draws one too loud breath followed by another.

Brown eyes.

Not blue.

Siren.

Not Red Chaos.

It tastes like a revelation.

It tastes like insanity.

"Yeah," Tommy says with a curling of his lips, the tension easing from his shoulders with a jerk of his head that forces the Warden to shift the trident back to avoid tearing his eyes open. "I think we understand each other *perfectly*."

And-

How many times has he not seen the smooth saccharine charade of Siren?

How many times has he not bared his teeth as he glowered into those golden eyes that showed no fear, glittering keenly in the dark of the night, beneath the stars with the taste of blood in his mouth and fear in his heart.

Clever, unafraid- a fucking *idiot*. That was what Siren was.

What *Tommy* needs to be.

He dares to move his right hand, the pink skin and black stained fingers hidden behind the leather as he raises it up to the other who doesn't move.

"What's in the past is in the past," Tommy throws the words back at the man with a ruthlessness that feels jagged and ugly inside of him with the cruel twist of his lips. "Wasn't that what you said? *Colleagues*," he tacks on with false sense of levity and irony that tastes rotten.

Not Red Chaos.

Not Red Chaos.

Not Red Chaos.

Not Red Chaos.

An armoured hand grasps his, fingers digging into the back of his hand as he's pulled up to his feet with a jagged jerk only to release him like hot iron, his hands brushing clinging dust from the trench coat as he takes a step back, straightening his collar with a roll of his shoulders.

Like this, he stands tall, taller than Warden, even and he cocks his head with a new sense of purpose.

"Let's find Jester, then," he gestures sweepingly, *theatrically*, with a grin that is not his behind the mask.

-

Because there's a very important distinction between Red Chaos and Siren.

Siren has no need to fear the Warden.

-

Eret pulls the golden knife out of the control panel of the elevator, ignoring the angry sparks, fingers curling tight around the handle of it.

"Damn you, Sam," they curse, slamming their arm and wrist up against the wall, a rare break in their façade with frustration that bleeds hot through their veins. "I still need him."

-

Dream shoves a hand into his chest and Wilbur stumbles back, ankles hitting the edge of the couch, and he drops down hard into the old worn fabric that fluffs up a layer of dust that makes him sneeze, eyes watering.

There's water damage near the front door, peeling paint, spots on the floor from blood that had seeped too deep to be removed by bleach.

Wilbur would know. There's more than one conveniently placed rug in their home.

"What is this place?" he asks, glancing around with mild curiosity as Dream steps away from him, the sound of his boots against the wooden floor echoing too loud in the silence.

His neon green hoodie stands out like a sore thumb.

"Anyone ever told you it's rude to ignore your guests?" Wilbur eases back, stretching his long legs out and crossing them at the ankles. "I'm like a cat, I want attention and entertainment. *Meow.*"

Dream pauses, masked face slowly angling around to stare at him over his shoulder for a long stretch of disbelieving silence.

"No? What about a dog- I heard you've got a spot open for a new one" Wilbur cocks his head, his grin too much teeth. "Left your last one at the pound, didn't you-"

The book in Dream's hand snaps shut.

"This is where Tommy and I grew up."

The sound of Tommy's name drains the amusement out of him, the words crumbling like ash in his mouth, and he stares upon the Number One Hero as he turns fully towards him, looking strangely small without the shadow that had been constant at his side.

White mask, ever smiling, cracks visible at the edges.

"We only have a small window of time," Dream's voice is impossible to read. "You want to know about Tommy, don't you?"

"What-“ Disbelief bleeds through him. "What's your angle?" Wilbur narrows his eyes, shoulders drawing tight as he plants both feet on the ground and leans forward. "You want me to believe you brought me all the way here to talk about *Tommy*-“

"Yes." Dream says simply. "That's exactly what I've done."

Wilbur's hands clasps together tightly.

"I don't believe you."

"I know," Dream cocks his head. "Try me."

Wilbur pursues his lips.

“What’s his favourite colour?”

“Blue,” Dream answers without hesitation. “You’d think red but- it’s loud, bright.” A beat. “Attention grabbing.”

Wilbur hands clenches.

“How old was he when he first met you?”

“Eight.” Dream turns around, his fingers dragging over the spines of the books on the dusty shelf, brushing it off to reveal the titles. “He-“

“I don’t want to hear it,” Wilbur interrupts, rising sharply with a press of his heel and pinning Dream with a dangerous look. “You’ve made your point,” he grits out.

Dream drags his thumb down a thick spine slowly without looking at him.

“He saved your life.”

“He did.” And how the knowledge fills his chest, heady and horrible at the same time.

“He saved mine,” Dream says after a long moment. “I don’t think he realises he did.”

“Oh shut up,” Wilbur drawls, stepping closer to a curling of the Hero’s shoulders and a rustle of the chains around his wrists. “He never should have been in a position to save *either of us* and you *know* it.”

“Would you have denied him it?” Dream’s voice is a knowing thing. “You’ve met him. He would have been out there, with or without me-“

“*Excuses,*” Wilbur spits.

“-at least, in my shadow, I could protect him,” Dream continues, undaunted, but-

Wilbur hears the tension in his voice and what kind of *guest* would he be if he ignored such an *obvious* sign of weakness?

“You tell yourself that often?” He steps closer still, just at the edge of Dream’s reach with a hunching of his shoulders. “Practice it in front of the mirror to ease your own guilt?” Mania glitters in his eyes and fills his chest and mouth with the familiar taste of cruelty. “Is that how you comforted yourself when he came bloody and hurt and ever *loyal*-“

“Don’t talk about things you don’t understand!” Dream whirls on him, lightning green strikes licking up his arms.

Wilbur reaches instinctively for his own powers, that familiar hum at the back of his throat, but remains painfully empty.

His hands curls tight even as his mouth stretches jagged.

“Did I hit a nerve?” He lowers his voice in a croon, staring into those two black dots on the white mask.

“L’Manberg laid the foundations for what Red Chaos is long before I met him,” Dream’s voice is heavy, tension badly hidden with the rise and fall of it.

“Lies,” Wilbur heaves out.

“-he represents everything good and bad about this city-”

“*Liar.*” Wilbur lurches out towards him, fingers curling tight in green fabric before slamming the Hero back against the bookshelf in a cloud of dust that glitters and spirals around them in the low lightning.

Dream’s shoulders draws tight but the Hero catches himself before he can lash out and Wilbur’s mouth twists in a grimace that is all teeth.

“He is a *child.*”

Silence stretches between them before the tension abruptly bleeds out of Dream’s shoulders, leaving him dangling in Wilbur’s desperate grip as his head tilts.

“How is it different than what was done to me?” he asks, a strange kind of twist to his voice. “And how is that so different from what the Angel did to *you*?”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about,” Wilbur bites out. “I made my choice-”

“And so did Tommy,” Dream cuts him off. “You do him a disservice if you won’t acknowledge that.” His head raises just an inch as Wilbur levels a dark look at his mask. “Tommy- from the moment I met him he was stubbornly set on a path that wouldn’t allow him a normal life. Starving for *more* in a world that had given him *nothing*.” A harsh breath. “He should hate L’Manberg but he *can’t*.”

Wilbur looks at him for a long moment before his mouth twists in a sneer and he laughs, a short barked thing of disbelief.

“This city,” he says slowly, “is built on nothing but *lies*.” Ice creeps through his veins with the curling of his fingers. “History is written by the winners and it’s an ugly one.” A shudder runs through him. “He protects a lie,” he says emptily, stepping back from the Hero.

Wilbur doesn’t remember his mother very well and the emotions are all twisted up, gnarled and raw where they rest inside his heart. She’d been his only stability, the only thing that stayed the same in a world that had felt frightening, her voice painting terrors in his mind of shadows in their steps.

It’s his hand caught in hers, always on the move, barely able to settle before she’d come hurrying inside and he’d learnt to keep his guitar close, backpack never far away to keep what little trinkets and valuables their kind of life allowed.

Run, run, run- always running, always on the move.

He'd learnt to keep his head down, always watching, paranoia rooting itself in his heart, so very afraid of losing sight of her for only a moment, his fingers tangling desperately in the fabric of her dresses.

"Never disappear like that again, you hear me!?" Her hands in his shoulders, digging in tight, his chest heaving as he stared wildly up at her, tears trailing down dirty cheeks.

"Anything could have happened! What if the Enforcers had found you- or worse, recognised you! I've told you again and again and again- it's to keep you safe! Everything I do is to keep you safe!"

And then, just abruptly, she's drawing him close, wrapping tight, clutching him close with desperation as his fists tangles tight in the fabric on her back.

"I thought I lost you." He feels the tremble that runs through her body like a shudder, smells the last remaining perfume on her skin his nose buries against, sobbing wetly with snot and tears and pleadings for her to forgive him. *"Oh my love, you frightened me so,"* she whispers into his ear and it only makes him cry harder, clinging just as desperately back.

When she finally untangles from him she's already reaching for the tail end of her dress, dabbing at his cheeks as he sniffles.

"Oh my brave boy, tears don't suit you, smile for me."

Always with the dresses, flowing softly, sometimes stained with mud from desperate steps that he would pick in the dark of the night as she slept curled up beside him on the hard floor, always taking turns, a knife clutched to his chest as he stared out the window into the dark night.

On the rare day she would beckon him close and hand him a brush, seated neatly on her knees as he gently brushed it through her hair, untangling the brown locks as she hummed, singing softly, sometimes telling him stories.

Those moments were the closest he'd come to something like *peace*.

"L'Manberg was once a beautiful place," she tells him, her gaze distant. *"There were pictures- I wish you could have seen them. The L'Manberg that was meant to be yours."*

"Did you know L'Manberg once had a King?" Her hand brushes over his wild curls, a vain attempt at controlling them that she gives up with a fond sight. *"You would have looked perfect in a crown, my little prince."* A bop of her finger against his nose. *"And I'd be right there beside you, of course! The two of us together, always."*

"Did I ever tell you about the Tree of L'Manberg? It used to bloom, the leaves the brightest green you'd ever seen!" She'd spun, the light brightening her eyes, brown like his, the tail of her dress spinning dramatically and he remember he'd thought her pretty, her smile lightning up the room as his fingers paused their plucking on the guitar. *"And one day it will bloom again, when it's yours again."* She'd turned to him, a breathless picture with he joy that was so rare on her face. *"Play for me! Play for me and let me dance for you, my love."*

She'd grabbed the tail end of her dress, dipping in a curtsy, waiting for him to find the first notes, growing more sure as she took the first steps, her laughter ringing out bright as she spun, dress flaring out.

He remembers- it had been blue, that night, a golden shawl wrapped around her shoulders, an echo of the suit he'd donned years later in a mockery of the Enforcers that had made their life hell.

His trim golden, like her, instead of their red.

Their last night together is just a blur of memories of a hand tugging him hurriedly in the night, a strained voice and the bleeding soles of his feet against the cold pavement in the dark night, his guitar clumsily clutched to his chest and shoes left behind.

The knowledge that they were being chased and then him being hidden amidst the dirt and trash with soot smudged on his cheeks from her hands.

"Keep your head down," her voice urges him, a blurry face and palms against his cheeks.
"You must never let them know who you are or they'll destroy you, my love."

A kiss against his brow before shouts made her draw back, a blurry shape in a blue dress.

"L'Manberg is yours, never forget it."

Anything to hide the dirty truth of L'Manberg's foundation.

He remembers curling up, rain smattering on the dark dirty streets, remembers the haunting image of the white tree of L'Manberg on the arms of the Enforcers at her heels, their heavy boots hitting the pools of water as he made himself incorporeal, hiding like a coward.

Like a child, Phil would correct if he could hear him, a gentle hand on his shoulder.

After that it's months on the streets, busking for a handful of coins and scraps, his ruined feet badly hidden in socks that crusts with blood and dirt, torn open again and again from walking through the nights, getting himself further and further away, aimlessly and doggedly.

He doesn't remember a lot of it, everything blurring together, the white tree of L'Manberg standing out starkly on the arms of Enforcers at every street corner in their blue coats with red trim and golden masks, shouting after him, a constant fear pounding with the beat of his heart that slowly turned into something rotten and ugly.

Until Phil had found him.

A man, youthful despite the many years he'd walked on this earth, watching the world change around him.

Wilbur's first clear memory after those dark days is of Phil's wing, large and haunting, shielding him from the light summer rain with a soft curling of a smile and a hand reaching out towards him where he'd sat, glowering, thin arms curled around the neck of his guitar.

The only thing he had left of his mother, strings broken, his fingers callused and bloody from plucking them.

"Don't compare Tommy to L'Manberg. He's- he's so much *more*." A breath and then his head snaps up, eyes levelling on the Hero who stills. "How much do you know about the *true* history of L'Manberg, Dream?"

"Not enough," Dream says after a long moment. "More than most," he adds.

"Then you know about the Soot family, don't you?" Wilbur's lips twists in mockery. "My *mother's* family." He turns his palms upwards. "She was the last of them, did you know that? Grew up learning all about the dirty history of L'Manberg and then in turn telling it to her one and only son."

Mania spreads in his chest, swallowing up rationality with the spread of his grin.

"They say that L'Manberg was built by Villains but oh, the truth is never so easy is it?" He laughs. "No. No the truth is much *uglier* than that."

"It's all yours," his mother would whisper to him as a child, holding him close, entrusting him with the secrets that the city was do desperate to hide. *"But they robbed us of it, smeared our names and hunted us down because of our power."* Her heartbeat against his ear, his curls gently smothered down by her cold hands, always so cold, the phantom side too strong, robbing her of any warmth. *"You are everything they feared us to become and you must be careful. You can't trust anyone in L'Manberg. It's a city built on lies, rotten to its very core."*

Eyelids flagging close, a soft fleeting brush of her lips against his temple.

"You'll make it all right, won't you, my love?"

"L'Manberg- it was never meant to be," he breathes with a feverish belief that roots deep and his mouth bares teeth. "I'm a slow-burning fuse and I will be its destruction."

Dream's head tilts.

"And what about Tommy?"

Wilbur jerks, staggering back, the damning smile of the white mask following him as he draws a jagged breath that prickles like ice in his lungs.

"He dedicated his life to become a Hero, to protect this city." Dream's voice is a damning thing. "You'd take all of that away from him?"

"He'll understand," Wilbur shakes his head, shoulders hunching. "He'll be safe, away from all of this, no more Heroes or Villains--"

"He won't see it that way--"

"He'll be *free*," Wilbur cuts him off ruthlessly, feverishly. "No more fucking- *child soldiers*! The Hero Commission, the corruption- all of it will be *gone*--"

“And then what?” Dream steps towards him as Wilbur’s head snaps up, giving him a wild look, heart pounding in his chest. “You’d leave it in ruins?” And Wilbur knows that Dream’s reads his intention in his eyes because the Hero shakes his head slowly. “Tommy saw something in you. Something that made him trust you.”

Wilbur’s breaths are harsh, a dawning realisation that settles ugly.

“You were watching him,” he chokes out. “That’s- that’s the only way you could know about us. You-“

“I kept an eye on him,” Dream snaps defensively as Wilbur stares at him in disbelief. “Made sure he was safe- or as safe as he could be. I couldn’t-“ The Hero takes a step back, shaking his head. “I was being watched, I couldn’t interfere-“

Wilbur throws his head back with a sudden laugh that rings loud.

“Oh that must have been *something*. ” He staggers, shoulder bumping up against the wall that he slouches against, cheek pressing against the old tapestry with a tilt of his head. “How did it feel?” he wonders, a heady sort of rush in his chest. “Your little dog stumbling upon *me* out of all the people in L’Manberg-“

“Don’t call him that,” Dream snarls with a jerk.

Wilbur sobers up. “You’re right.” He lowers his face, looking at the Hero through his lashes. “He’s not *yours* anymore, is he? He’s out of your shadow, growing into his own person and you can do nothing but watch, caught under Schlatt’s thumb like a pretty little fool.” He raises his hands up to his throat. “Are you aching to kill me still, Dream? To wrap your hands around my throat. C’mon, make it *really* personal this time-“ he goads. “No one would know, it’s just me and you-“

“And me,” a slime peeks his way out of Dream’s hood and Wilbur jerks, hands dropping, before he slowly turns to level Quackity’s little spy with dark eyes.

He huffs a harsh breath, loosening his shoulders into a bored slump.

“And what are you doing here?” Wilbur demands. “I thought Jester was still having a *lovely* time in Pandora.”

Dream fishes him out, dropping him down on the table with a wet slide of goop that he wipes discreetly on his hoodie.

The little slime’s mouth sets in a mulish little stubborn pout as Wilbur side-eyes him, irritation prickling beneath his skin.

“I’m here for Mr Red.”

“*Mr Red*, ” Wilbur repeats slowly, dragging his eyes to Dream. “And you trust him?”

“Tommy sent him. Told me not to kill you.” Dream shrugs, turning his back towards him in a nonchalant move that makes Wilbur’s fingers twitch. “He trusts the slime.”

Tommy told me not to kill you. Wilbur mouths the words to himself, eyes tracking down to the little knitted hoodie of the slime with new eyes.

His hand brushes his bare neck, an ache in his heart.

“I see,” he drawls, shifting to lean fully back against the wall with false nonchalance. “And Jester?”

The slime wilts. “Still in Pandora but!” It straightens up importantly. “Mr Red is going in there to help him out!”

Dream and Wilbur both pauses before both their heads snaps down to the slime.

“Tommy is *what*-“ Wilbur demands in horror.

“He can’t-“ Dream lurches towards the slime and Wilbur tenses, watching as the Hero sinks to his knees without grace or dignity. “You’re sure? You’re one hundred percent sure that it was *Red Chaos* that went into Pandora?”

The slime shrinks, but its shoulders remain set, nodding slowly. “I saw him go inside! He’s dressed-up as Mr Siren but I know it’s him!”

Wilbur blinks.

“Wait a second, he’s *what now*-“

“*Why didn’t you tell me!?*”

“It was too dangerous to be Mr Red in the Pit so he dressed up as *you*,” the slime pipes up, peering unsurely up at him before looking to Dream. “You didn’t ask,” he says, just a tad petulantly. “And you told me to be quiet!”

Wilbur’s back slides down against the wall until he hits the floor, staring disbelievingly at the slime with his hands clenched in his lap, hunching forward.

“He’s wearing my outfit?” he croaks out. “He’s- why- it’s not *safe*-“

“It was a clever move,” Dream cuts in, hand in his hood, tugging at his hair with a rough shake of his head as he starts to pace. “Everyone is looking for Red Chaos at the moment but a second Siren running around- it will throw people off and throw doubts at Schlatt’s competency at the same time.” He halts, staring at the clock above the door. “We don’t have time-“

“Fuck off.”

“We have to go- Schlatt will be at the meeting point at any moment-“

“Tommy is in the most secure fucking prison in the world dressed up as *me* and you think I care about *Schlatt*-?“

“You will care.” Dream hunkers down in front of him, the little slime trotting up at his side, one small hand grasping onto the hem of his pants. “You *have* to if you care about *Tommy*.”

Wilbur’s head snaps up just as Dream pushes up his mask, revealing leaf green eyes and a smatter of freckles across a proud nose, his hood falling down to reveal dark blond curls.

“I used to stand beside him and look into the mirror and I’d think that, maybe we do look a bit like brothers, but I never told him,” Tommy’s voice ghosts in the back of his mind.

A jagged scar crosses his face, just missing his eye and slanting down over his nose to reach the corner of his lip.

Techno had left that scar, Wilbur knows.

“Tommy trusts you.” Dream sounds like he’s trying to convince himself of the insanity of his own words, lips twisting harshly in a grimace. “And I’m running out of people to turn to-“

“Oh are you now?” Wilbur interrupts viciously. “Imagine that, the consequences of your own actions-“

“Shut up,” Dream cuts him off roughly, desperately. “Please just *listen*.”

Wilbur’s mouth thins but his feet slides out until his legs are flat against the floor, the Hero crouched between them.

“You have five minutes,” he allows reluctantly, despite the way it sets his teeth on edge. “For Tommy,” he tacks on, raising his head to look into those green eyes.

Not blue, Wilbur thinks with some spiteful smugness.

“No, I don’t,” Dream laughs, a strange choked wheezy thing, giving a short shake of his head before sobering up with a breath that heaves his chest in a harsh exhalation, eyes closing, and-

Despite himself Wilbur feels a shiver crawl up his spine as they open up again, fixing intently on him as the Hero clasps his hands.

“I have a request to make of you, Wilbur Soot.”

Chapter End Notes

God Jul, Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays-

Corpsey Claus (thank you Noa) is bringing you angst with today's chapter! I know I know. Truly shocking coming from me. I'm just- full of surprises like that.

Everyone is just kinda pogging through it at this point, huh

Love that for them

Just wanted to spare an extra moment to just- send all the love to all of you who are following along on this journey. It warms my heart, what a year it's been.

Hope you're having a good one, wherever you are out there in the world<3

-

If you're interested there's a [Hush Now Discord](#) that tends to go *brrrrr* with the theories in designated channels and also have a lot of fun chatter and chill people on top of scoops of chaos with my lovely mods<3

There's also a Hush Now Index created by me and Isa, and you can access it in the "Hush Now Index" channel on my server for those of you who are interested! Hella shout-out to Isa for the incredible work she put into it<3 It looks amazing.

You can find me on **tumblr** here: [corpse-art](#)

And I'm also on **twitter**:

main: [corpsey_art](#)

alt: [corpseyreads](#)

I post a one hour countdown on all my social medias for a new chapter update if you're interested in such a thing :)

-

DUDES. We have new Hush Now art!! They're all amazing. Go and give them all so much love<3

(And if I ever miss linking your art- pls let me know!! I try to make sure I keep track of everything but I am but human)

[the burdens we carry by 652Phantom](#) art

[things come and go by NoasTea/a> animation long time no see by 652Phantom](#) art

[red chaos by rhoshilio/a> art](#)

[wait- that's my idiot by enterthefunny/a> art](#)

[tusks by philocreatif/a> art](#)

[FANART MASTERPOST](#)

Chapter 50

Chapter Notes

i keep forgetting to add these, pls

Tommy - Red Chaos

Heroes:

Dream - Dream

404 - George

Valorant - Sapnap

Royal - Eret

Rose - Hannah

Schlatt - Schlatt (formerly Judge)

Villains:

Angel of Death - Phil

Blood God - Techno

Siren - Wilbur

Warden - Sam

Lethe - Ranboo

Judge - Tubbo

Jester - Quackity

Nemesis - Niki

Eris - Eret

Vigilantes:

Faux Pas - Fundy

Chronos - Karl

Kitten - TinaKitten

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Be brave like Dream.

When Tommy had first stepped into the Hero scene the words had echoed through his mind, bleeding out through his veins, desperately embraced as he faced a world entirely unfamiliar to him.

Admiration, hatred, envy- and then, *hope*, that bled into voices calling out his name as he arrived, Dream's powers running through his veins, red zipping up his legs as he pushed it out, steps quick against the ground and heart in his throat.

"Red Chaos!"

“Save me please-“

“My daughter-“

“Daddy is trapped-“

“There’s a fire! My baby-“

“I couldn’t do anything-“

“Please save them.”

It’s a world where failure means death.

His, strangers, *Dream’s-*

The Villains that face him on the opposite side of the battlefield with powers both unpredictable and violent.

We don’t kill.

There’s bruises that stares back at him starkly in the mirror, threads that stitches his skin back together, ice packs to nurse headaches and broken noses and a constant exhaustion that wires tight through him as he slumps down against Dream’s side with a groan.

“I’m proud of you.”

“You did good.”

Dream makes it worth it.

Laughs shared in near death, still riding the shock and adrenaline rush of it all, excitement that bleeds hot through his heart along with pride that fills him until he’s fit to burst.

Being a Hero is- *everything*.

Even when he hates it, he loves it.

To be Red Chaos, to be more than *just Tommy*, that’s what Dream gives him.

Dream stands at the top of the world and Tommy stands at his side, only sixteen with bright eyes and a grin that is all his behind the metal teeth of his mask as Dream speaks confidently into the microphone.

Be brave like Dream.

And-

He doesn’t know when the words change, burying deep into his heart like needles that prickles at his skin.

Be better.

Be stronger.

Tommy holds Dream's hand, staring at his mentor asleep in the bed, wrapped in bandages, the skin on his face swollen with the stitches that would be removed, smoothing out into the pink skin of a fresh scar that dips the end of his smile on one side.

Be more.

It's a realisation, a revelation and a damnation all at the same time.

A realisation that there's no end to how far he will go for his mentor.

-

And-

Tommy is only human at the end of the day and he stares at himself in the mirror, sixteen-years-old, exhaustion painting deep bags beneath his eyes and mouth twisting in a grin that's more a snarl.

A harsh breath.

Cold water being splashed into his face, tense muscles rubbed with rough palms, thumbs digging in just below his ears, dressed in one of Dream's ridiculous hoodies as he hunches over the sink, the faucet running harshly as he struggles to compartmentalize and pull himself together.

The lines between Red Chaos and Tommy blurring more than he wants them to.

More than he can allow them to.

I'm Dream's.

It's such an easy oversimplification of the mess of his mind but it feels like stability, something to cling to and he breathes in and out with it.

I'm Dream's.

-

It hurts.

Not being that.

Destabilizes him more than he wants to admit to as he sits slumped at the kitchen table, the silence far too loud in his apartment, staring at Clementine's green leaves with his chin digging into the harsh wood of the table, mouth twisted in a harsh grimace behind the fold of his arm in front of him.

In those first days he feels like a shadow of himself, like hope had been clawed right out of his chest, the world all the darker for it.

And then- *Wilbur*.

If the rest of the world is a cloudy grey sky then Wilbur is the sun, Tommy remembers thinking, sinking deeper against the older man's side, Wilbur angling to rub his cheek against his head like a cat.

I could burn myself on you, Wilbur Soot.

The first to look at him and *see him*. A knowing look in those brown eyes, an understanding that Tommy *craves*. All the broken ugly pieces of possessiveness and violence and loneliness that itches beneath his skin laid bare, so ill fit for the Hero he's supposed to be and clawing from the depth of his being without Dream to curb it, teeth baring instead of smiles.

He wants to tear the world apart, wants to make it hurt with the ache in his heart that threatens to drown him.

He wants to *scream* until there's no air left in his lungs.

Wants to collapse on his knees, knowing there is someone there to catch him, to feel the press of that soft yellow sweater beneath his forehead, to be held close by arms that wrap so easily around him when he's crumbling apart.

Red Chaos was never meant to stand on his own.

Tommy doesn't know what it means to not belong to someone.

-

There's death on his hands and red eyes burns into his, the brand of a god branding both their skin, tusks that push against their lips and more likeness than he knows what to do with the curling of mismatched hands.

One pale, one pink.

Inhumanity, an otherness, skin that isn't his but *is* with a swish of the tuft at the end of a tail.

"I want you to work with me like you worked with Dream, to follow me like you followed him."

To be valued.

To be *seen*.

A leader and someone desperate to follow.

Codependent in the worst of ways.

-

Somewhere, where he doesn't want to linger on it, the stretch of dark wings haunts him, clever blue eyes and hands that had guided him patiently and with care in his apartment with a gifted black feather that rests just above his heart.

A father that would watch the world burn for his sons.

A stray thought that he doesn't allow to linger as he watches the way Wilbur folds around his father, envy coiling rotten and ugly as he looks away because he's not supposed to *want*.

Not this. He's too old, it's a childish sort of thing and he wants nothing to do with it and yet-

And yet-

~~What if he found me instead-~~

-

~~Then what-~~

-

~~What if-~~

-

~~Would I know the same kind of love?~~

-

There's Siren's swagger in his steps as he makes his way deeper into Pandora with a twist of his heel and a spreading of his arms as Warden's steps slows just steps just an inch, fingers tightening around the golden handle of the trident.

Goldgoldgold, the hunger makes his tusks ache as he walks backwards down the dark hallway with a nonchalant folding of his hands behind his head.

"They could really do with some decorating, don't you agree?" Tommy muses, head tilting, eyes dragging over the cells with their enforced doors. "A bit of *yellow*, a dot of *red*, maybe some blue to give an illusion of a sky-"

He thinks, briefly, of the wall Wilbur had painted in his apartment before he forces his mind back on the presence with a shiver that runs down his spine.

There's heat the deeper they get, Warden moving steadily with steady measured steps and a quiet rustle of his armour.

He can feel the prickling of his neck, all too aware that his every move is being watched behind the visor and well-

“Actually-“ Tommy spins, stepping back, putting himself at the Villain’s side again. “I can’t help but notice you feel pretty comfortable with where we’re going.”

The silence stretches between them and Tommy’s jaw clenches.

“The strong silent type, huh.” He forces himself to relax and in a moment of insanity slaps a hand against Warden’s shoulder. “Don’t worry,” he tells the sharp ends of the trident twists around him with a glimmering sheen, fingers digging into the soft fabric beneath the golden pauldrons with a bunching of his shoulders. “I’m chatty enough for both of us,” he half-wheezes out with a dizzy lurch of panic.

“You’re feeling chatty, are you?” The Warden’s head tilts and there’s cruelty in the way the words shape despite the cool indifference because- “Could have done with that before.”

And-

There’s a ringing in his mind, his knuckles bunching white beneath his gloves, and for a moment he’s back in that cell, his knees threatening to fold beneath him as he levels more weight against the Warden and-

“Did you know, this entire time?” The Warden presses, taking a step closer as Tommy claws into the metal of his pauldron with ice in his veins. “Because it’s *interesting* that you would come here with *Royal*, another Hero, instead of a proper Syndicate member, isn’t it?”

“That’s not-“ his voice comes out weak.

Ignored.

“I’m not a fool, Red Chaos. I know you’re wrapped up in this more than you want to admit to and you might have manipulated the Blood God and Angel to trust you but I won’t make the same mistake.”

Stupid, Tommy thinks, his mind spiralling *I’m so fucking stupid-*

He’d pushed it.

Stupid, stupid, stupid-

The Warden’s visor leans closer towards him and he can’t even make out the reflection of himself through a vision that spots black with his heaving breaths.

Not Red Chaos.

It’s a weak thin thing to cling to, everything too much as he chokes on a noise that isn’t human, the world fracturing around him and-

There’s just him.

No Dream, no Wilbur, no fucking *Techno-*

The next thing Tommy knows his chin is colliding against metal with a clack of his teeth, tasting blood as an arm loops around his back, drawn against a cold hard chest with panic that claws up his throat and it's-

It's-

I can't do this.

The thought is feverish, desperate, thrumming through his veins with panic so thick he wants to sob as he sinks his fingers deeper into the softness beneath unforgiving metal.

It's me, he wants to beg, to plead. *Look at me and see me, Sam.*

Tell me you wouldn't have hurt me had you only known.

It's weakness, unforgiving and ugly as he scrambles to get himself together.

Be brave like Dream.

Be untouchable like Siren.

But he's just Tommy, alone with a man who had hurt him so terribly with the breaking of his bones over and over again, terror digging wretched and deep.

I'm not fine-

I'm not fine-

"I'm- fine," he gasps and he hates the rawness, quivering, a strange laugh bubbling out of his chest as he drags his head down, forehead meeting cold metal. "I'm- *fine*."

He's barely standing, wibbly wobbly in a way that tastes like fracturing sanity.

"... I helped make Pandora into what it is today." Warden's voice is strange but Tommy barely notices in the spiralling of his head, even as he forces his focus desperately on the words, heart beating too fast inside his chest with the taste of blood on his tongue. "In some ways, it is my greatest creation."

It might be his tongue bleeding. He can't tell.

"It's been a long time." If Tommy pretends, he can almost hear the softness of Sam's voice behind the metallic harshness of the voice changer. "It was never meant to be what it is today."

The arm keeping him upright tightens and Tommy jerks, the side of his head colliding against the Warden's jaw with a *clang* that draws an awful choked noise out of his throat as he freezes in place.

"Sorry," he wheezes, the words thin from the lack of air in his lungs.

“Just-“ There’s a sigh and Tommy’s boneless body gets hoisted up into something that so strangely could be compared to a hug that- “Just *breathe*. ”

He snort giggles, quite sure he’s half out of his mind.

“Copy me,” Sam tells him, a hand splaying against his spine, and Tommy feels the way he exaggerates his breathing, so familiar, something Dream had done for him more than once.

“In for four, Tommy, that’s it-“

Tommy knows this, his lungs just aren’t cooperating right, faltering in a gasp after barely getting to two-

His eyes prickles, lips trembling-

This isn’t me.

It’s a weak thing that tastes like pleading.

Sam draws another breath, exaggerated and-

“The discovery of the use of obsidian was something I happened upon by accident when I was still a teenager. On its own it does nothing, but once you apply the use of redstone it can be manipulated into slowly siphoning the energy of those with powers-”

A part of Tommy wants nothing more than for Warden to shut up but-

Another, deeper part of him, aches for Sam’s voice- in the way he’d tell little stories during quiet hours at the café while Tommy was working, Fran curled up at his feet.

He’d be nibbling on one of Sam’s newest creations, maybe some silly little dog-shaped cookie he’d feel guilty about biting the head off with the following sweetness spilling over his tongue and-

“-it’s... intricate and not something that can be duplicated or recreated by anyone but me, and perhaps it’s for the best-”

Tommy misses Fran.

Misses her soft thick white fur, the thumping of her tail, those clever eyes and the click-clack of her claws against the floor.

Misses the way his fingers had sunk into the fluffy fur when he’d been knocked back with eager swipes of her tongue all over his face in messy dog kisses.

You’re no better than a dog.

Being compared to Fran, it isn’t so bad, really.

To be a dog, loyal and unfaltering.

The irony of it twists his lips behind his mask because- out of all things the first hybrid he'd bit had been the opposite and he remembers all too well the rectangular ears of a cat he'd clawed bloody in panic, mouth clamped down on the collar of his shirt to muffle his screams as a tufty blood covered tail wound its way out from the end of his spine in the alley he'd picked for the night.

The fur-

The fur had been pale, oddly striped beneath the shine of the red clumping it up into a miserable looking thing.

Dream had laughed the first time Tommy told him about it- folding on himself with wheezing giggles as Tommy's cheeks had flared hot in embarrassment. *"Of course- of course it'd be the opposite- you never stop surprising me, Tommy."*

"It's not like I knew when I bit them," he'd grumbled back.

"It's good! Don't- oh come on, I didn't mean it like that. I've always been more of a cat person, you know that." Tommy had known that, having tagged along on more than one occasion to watch Dream coo over the stray cats, armed with cans of food and bowls to be poured with fresh water. *"It fits you."*

The rest of the world hadn't seemed to agree and he'd told Dream as much only to get a choked *"oh god-*" followed by more laughing as Tommy rolled his eyes, watching his lunatic of a mentor a bit fondly.

It had become an inside joke between the two of them, shared looks when another Hero had barked after him, their shoulders bumping and Dream echoing a mocking little *meow* meant for only him, dodging Tommy's half-hearted swipe with a telling shake of his shoulders from quiet laughter.

He draws a shuddering breath that rattles his lungs, fingers clawing into Sam's back and eyes squeezing close.

You hurt me.

You have no idea how much.

Words he cannot say because Sam can't know that Red Chaos is Tommy and the Warden won't *care* if he dies.

Sam-

Sam might not either and it hurts, it hurts, it *hurts*.

It was never meant to be this complicated.

Sam was never meant to be Warden.

Wilbur was never meant to be Siren.

But they are.

He allows himself to breathe in, smelling nothing of the familiar lingering scent of sweets and dog fur or gunpowder with something hot and leaden in his chest.

This isn't me.

So, who are you then? The Blood God's voice makes him gag, coughing as it ghosts through the back of his brain, crawling down the stem of his brain with laughter that rattles his teeth.

Fuck off, he thinks furiously, cold metal pressing against his forehead and harsh breaths forced through parted lips. *You're not helping.*

Would you beg me to? The god wonders with an idleness and underlying dark curiosity that drags needles down his bones.

Tommy bares his teeth and laughter rattles through his soul.

So brave, and yet you cannot stand on your own two feet, the terror rooting so deep that it makes me hunger. The brand around his wrist flares hot and Tommy jerks, sucking back a horrible noise. **That human rattles your very mind into a disarray, whelp.**

He can smell the scent of flowers intermingling with rot and he can almost *see* the god, all-consuming where it rests on its plane of existence, connected to him with the mark that rests around his wrist like a cuff.

The pain behind his eyes climbs until he can barely feel the air that fills his lungs, somehow desperately still-

Alive.

I'm-

You're weak.

Tommy flinches and just like that he's back in his body, the god's presence withdrawing with a dismissal that send humiliation burning hot through him as the being shifts, it's boredom heavy enough to drown in.

My vessel is stronger than that human and yet you tremble. What was it you called yourself- a Hero? Cruel mockery that wraps around his heart with a whisper of- **What a miserable little thing you are, whelp.**

The words echoes, bouncing inside his head as he's once again left alone, and Tommy stares at the *goldgoldgold* in front of his eyes, pupils blown wide behind brown lenses.

“- there's few who knows the skills required-“

The Warden is still talking, a droll thing of information that goes into one ear and out the other, not registering, his whistling breaths too loud.

I'm- He blinks, his mind strangely empty. *I'm trying my best.*

I'm-

I'm trying-

I'm-

His fingers claws into metal.

I'm trying- I'm- I'm trying my best, I am.

There's no one to hear him and his mouth twists behind his mask, a terrible thing of anger and grief alike that he wants nothing to do with.

Because-

He's supposed to be *better* and he doesn't know *how*.

Is this how far I'll go? he wonders and a strange thing bubbles inside his chest. *Can't even keep myself together for five minutes and I'm supposed to save people? Save Dream, save Wilbur, save L'Manberg-*

He feels small.

Young.

Stupid.

So fucking stupid-

He's-

"Warden!" Tommy stiffens, the muscles in his shoulders going rigid.

Not now, not now, not now-

"Judge." Warden's hand land on his shoulder and Tommy's brain nearly short-circuits on itself, jerking himself free with a stumbling step that folds his right leg and-

An arm slips through his, catching him with a tug and pinning it tight in an awkward sort of jerky move with a squeeze and-

For a moment Tommy considers tearing himself away, but-

He sags against the older teenager, the side of his head colliding with the surprisingly soft fabric of a suit, a feverish sort of tremble running through him.

A tail brushes against his, but- when he looks up Ranboo is staring straight forward, at Tubbo's back, the older having placed himself in front of them both.

He wonders if he imagined it.

He can't-

His brain feels heavy, buzzing with *too much*.

“Looking for Jester?” Tubbo places a casual hand on his hip as Warden’s visor moves from Tommy to him, the trident lowering.

“What are you-“

“So are we!” Tubbo’s voice is cheery as he cuts him off, a strange thing inside the dour walls of the prison of Pandora. “Isn’t that just so *lucky*, bossman?”

Somehow-

Tommy feels those words are directed to him as he stares at the curling dark horns of the ram skull.

Chapter End Notes

tommy: so listen, i have this amazing idea for coping
tommy, two seconds later: actually-

!! but look :D our boy got a hug :)

ranboo and tubbo enters the scene, finally. just as our boy was about to reach the last end of the straw. lucky indeed, tubbo.

you don't just- recover from two weeks of torture at the hands of someone you trusted and tommy isn't doing nearly as fine as he pretends to. mans going through it

(... i feel like i should maybe clarify, after last chapter, that wilbur's mother isn't like, she wasn't quite well, you know. take her words with a pinch of salt, yeah?)

thank you for all the love and support<3 i read every comment and save every art, it's truly an absolute joy

hope you're having a good one wherever you are out there in the world<3

corpsey, out

-

If you're interested there's a [Hush Now Discord](#) that tends to go *brrrrr* with the theories in designated channels and also have a lot of fun chatter and chill people on top of scoops of chaos with my lovely mods<3

There's also a Hush Now Index created by me and Isa, and you can access it in the "Hush Now Index" channel on my server for those of you who are interested! Hella shout-out to Isa for the incredible work she put into it<3 It looks amazing.

You can find me on **tumblr** here: [corpse-art](#)

And I'm also on **twitter**:

main: [corpsey_art](#)

alt: [corpseyreads](#)

I post a one hour countdown on all my social medias for a new chapter update if you're interested in such a thing :)

-

DUDES. We have new Hush Now art!! They're all amazing. Go and give them all so much love<3

(And if I ever miss linking your art- pls let me know!! I try to make sure I keep track of everything but I am but human)

[hero or villain? by itsliliesval/a> art](#)

[under the warden's gaze by GH0UL1SHGHOST/a> art](#)

[FANART MASTERPOST](#)

Chapter 51

Chapter Notes

i really should keep posting chapters when i'm not half out of my mind from lack of sleep and about to pass out, i actually remembered these this time-
(i say that and then immediately had to move them from summary to beginning of chapter notes pls, i cry)

Tommy - Red Chaos

Heroes:

Dream - Dream

404 - George

Valorant - Sapnap

Royal - Eret

Rose - Hannah

Schlatt - Schlatt (formerly Judge)

Villains:

Angel of Death - Phil

Blood God - Techno

Siren - Wilbur

Warden - Sam

Lethe - Ranboo

Judge - Tubbo

Jester - Quackity

Nemesis - Niki

Eris - Eret

Vigilantes:

Faux Pas - Fundy

Chronos - Karl

Kitten - TinaKitten

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“You’re not supposed to be here.”

“None of us are, if you want to talk facts, big man.” Tubbo’s response is quick, his voice light. “I mean, I guess Red Chaos comes the closest to having some rights to this place, being a Hero and all, part of the guys locking these poor shmucks up.”

Tommy sucks a breath.

Being a Hero and all.

The words resonate strangely inside him where he stands half-collapsed against Ranboo whose tail is swishing anxiously, his own hanging limp and listless.

He feels like a puppet cut from its strings, emotionally exhausted and missing a warm spot to curl up in and ignore the world for a month or five.

Warden's trident lowers further. "You should leave."

"No can do, I'm afraid." Tubbo waves a dismissive hand. "See, we came in here to find Jester and Nemesis and we're not leaving without them." He turns his head to look over his shoulder and just for a moment Tommy finds himself staring into brown eyes, the furrowed brows visible in the round holes of the ram skull, before Tubbo turns back to Warden with an easy shrug. "Besides, you need us."

The Warden straightens. "I don't-"

"You do," Tubbo interrupts plainly and the change in his voice makes Tommy's shoulders bunch. "*Clearly.*"

The dig is intentional, and the meaning all too clear, and Tommy's breaths are still whistling through his teeth.

"You need Red Chaos here for something, right?" Tubbo continues when Warden remains silent. "So why don't you leave him to Lethe here- you know how he is, great with spooked animals." A pause. "Mostly *cats*, but well- I'm sure a dog isn't *too* different."

A strange emphasis that makes his neck prickle.

"*We hybrids gotta stick together, right?*" That's what Tubbo had told him after catching him with Enderchest and Enderpearl and-

His brain hurts, thoughts thick like syrup and too quick at the same time, bouncing like ping pong balls inside the ringing of his mind and-

Tommy jerks as a hand slides down, pressing over his heart, a noise choked out as another arm settles over his shoulder to catch him.

"It's okay-" Ranboo's voice comes too close, in a hush, the heat of his arm a burning thing against his shoulder, and Tommy's teeth sets in a twisted snarl of discomfort. "I know you don't know us, or have any reason to trust us, but we're here to *help*." The words are rushed, layered with anxiousness. "Let Judge handle Warden and focus on me. You just had a panic attack, you're- you might still be having one actually, which isn't good, and I need you-" Ranboo draws an abrupt and sudden breath. "I'm rambling, that's not- I'm not helping-"

A distant part of Tommy feels the urge to snort even as he blinks, his vision spotting before he gives himself a rough shake that *nearly* knocks the arm off him only-

Ranboo that bastard tightens his grip, as if he has *any right to-*

Get off me, Tommy thinks a bit distantly, fingers twitching.

“Think of him as one of your animals-“ Ranboo mutters under his breath above him and Tommy wonders just *how* offended he should be, the older teenager shifting with a rustle, and-

His brain shuts off as arms are suddenly looping around him, his cheek squished up against a white button-up and surprisingly soft suit, the red tie brushing the tip of his nose as long arms wraps around him, circled beneath his armpits and around his ribs in an awkward sort of thing that pulls him to his toes from the fucker’s lanky too-tall height.

Tommy stares at the fabric, feeling like a ragdoll as a hand pats between his shoulder blades, disbelief bleeding thick through him and-

He can hear Ranboo’s heartbeat against his ear, the harsh whistling of his breaths, becoming all too aware of the way he’s struggling to regulate his body’s intake of air and-

Ranboo is warm.

The heat presses like a hot iron against his skin above Siren’s mask that’s digging awkwardly into his cheek from the pressure.

Despite the pounding beats of the other’s nervous heart the breaths are slow, deliberate in the way Dream’s were when he was calming Tommy down, air sucked in, counted, breathed out.

His arms hangs loose at his sides and he makes no move to raise them, discomfort and a strange kind of numbness wrestling inside of him.

“Oh god, I’m hugging him- I’m hugging, be calm, relax, it’s fine- *please don’t stab me*- just focus on my breathing, be calm, look how calm I am-“ Ranboo is muttering anxiously above him, almost too low for him to hear. “Deep breaths,” his voice changes again, more firm, still layered with anxiousness in the rush of the words. “Just copy what I’m doing, mmhmm, like that-“

Tommy sags, squeezing his eyes shut.

“I’m going to fucking kill you,” he breathes out hoarsely. “Just- just give me a moment.”

Ranboo sways with a little jerk and then he’s slips out a high airy laugh that bleeds with relief and nervousness alike. “I’m- please don’t, man.”

-

Tubbo glances back, making sure Ranboo had Red Chaos properly secured, before focusing his full attention on the Warden.

This close he’s fairly certain that he’s not actually imagining the dull glow of purple that clings to the golden armour of the man, his ear flicking back curiously as he tilts his head, staring into the dark visor, wondering just what kind of expression lurked behind it.

There's very little of the Sam he knows in the stiff motions as the man shifts with a rustle, clearly wrestling with himself, which meant that there was at least a little bit of him left or Tubbo would have been dead on the spot.

He's considering it.

He lets out a slow breath, weighing his options carefully, and-

"Look man we're not looking to get in your way," Tubbo says in a low murmur, stepping closer, drawing the Warden's full attention to him and *only him* as he hears Ranboo's voice behind him. "You know how much I owe Quackity, *he saved my life*, and I have a chance to repay it here. So let's work together." A beat. "It's only *logical*, isn't it?"

A challenge, Tubbo keeping his gaze steady as the Warden straightens.

The first time Tubbo had seen Sam in his Villain get-up in person is inside the walls of Las Nevadas and he had kept away, shaking his head when Quackity had beckoned for him and melting into the crowd, staying firmly away.

Even there, among Villains, Heroes and Vigilantes, he had stood out beneath the golden dome that spanned out above them all and Tubbo had kept just out of sight, aware that Quackity was keeping an eye on him with a considering look but allowing it as he eyed up the plants near Warden, calculating how quick he'd be able to interfere-

He'd been sixteen and Quackity's hand had landed on his shoulder an hour later, steering him to his office before Tubbo had been able to make his carefully planned escape in car he'd just broken into.

"Is this about Red Chaos?" Quackity had asked after dropping down in his chair, sliding back a bit to throw one foot after another onto his desk, crossing them at the ankle, a knowing look in his eye as he made himself comfortable. *"It's okay if it is,"* he'd added when Tubbo's mouth had remained shut. *"I know **that man** didn't make things easy for you."*

"He wanted me to be his Red Chaos," Tubbo had said finally, bunching his knuckles. *"I couldn't-"* He'd paused, shaking his head. *"It doesn't matter, this isn't about me."* Quackity's head had tilted an inch, regarding him, but on this subject the man had rarely pushed him and so Tubbo had taken his time, hands slowly relaxing as he carefully considered his words. *"The whole world saw the Warden strike Red Chaos down."*

"So they did," Quackity had agreed, gaze unreadable.

"He'd just made a Hero." He'd brushed a palm down his shirt, tugging at the hem. *"Red Chaos- he was nothing more than a sidekick at that point, didn't stand for anything, and yet, the Warden went out of his way to nearly kill him."* He'd slowly nodded to himself before straightening up. *"So- I guess what I don't understand is why he did that."*

"Elaborate."

It had taken him several minutes to find the right words, Quackity idly pouring himself a glass of amber liquid after a raised brow that Tubbo had absently nodded to.

“Warden isn’t known for going out of his way to killing indiscriminately, he’s particular, this whole Red Chaos thing doesn’t fit his M.O.,” he’d said finally. *“Warden’s kill count is nothing like Techno’s, he’s- picky, I guess, is the word for it. So what reason would he have to go after someone who’d just made a Hero? Someone who barely had begun to establish his reputation? It doesn’t add up for me.”*

“You’re not wrong,” Quackity had agreed with a hum, watching him with a curious gleam in his eye. *“Sam is- he’s ridiculously good. Good in a way that seems unfair and misplaced in our world sometimes, you feel me?”* Quackity had leant back in his leather chair inside his office in Las Nevadas, hands folded together, a complicated flaring of his nose. *“But Sam- he’s always been driven by his own sense of justice and sometimes he gets lost in it.”* A pause. *“And then you’ve got the Warden and, well, that’s a whole other bag of cats.”* Quackity’s head had tilted. *“You remember Ponk, right?”*

“The Healer?” Tubbo had asked with some surprise. *“I remember him, yeah.”*

Quackity index fingers taps against the rest before it stills. *“The Warden is the one who cut off his arm.”*

“What-“

“Yeah, man. Cut it right off.” Quackity had shaken his head. *“It was clean work, I’ll give him that. Smart, one could even say. Leave the arm in a pool of blood as a distraction and let the Hero Commission think their precious little Healer is dead.”* A wave of his hand. *“Ponk was never told, never asked, and now he has to live with just one arm, indebted to the Syndicate, traded from one service to another. To the Warden that was the price of getting Ponk out, one he paid without hesitation to complete his mission. It wasn’t his price to pay, but pay it he did, and Ponk was left to reap the consequences.”* A shake of his head. *“That is the kind of logic the Warden works with- the mission comes before everything and anyone who stands in his way will be cut down.”*

Tubbo had considered the words, the tip of his boot pressed against the floor to idly swing the chair back and forth.

“You made a distinction between Sam and the Warden,” he’d said finally.

“So I did.” Quackity’s mouth had drawn up, the scar twisting it into a gnarly thing.

It had taken Tubbo only a moment to put the pieces together, sucking in a breath of realisation and perking up.

“You’re saying, that it wasn’t Sam that Red Chaos met that night-“

“But the Warden, yes.” Quackity had clapped his hands together, spreading his fingers out, staring at Tubbo over them. *“Sam- he can be reasoned with. But the Warden? You’re better off staying out of his way. He won’t stop until the mission is completed, or he’s dead. Red*

Chaos was unlucky and he paid the price for it.” A complicated look. “If Red’s smart he’ll stay out of his way in the future because the Warden doesn’t forget those who dared to stand in his way.”

“And if you get in the way?”

“Then you can kill me yourself.” Tubbo smiles in the mouth of the ram skull. “Touch a hair on Ranboo’s head and I’m killing you where you stand, though, just so we’re clear.”

The Warden considers him where he stands and Tubbo doesn’t move, planted firm and unmoving, thin vines wrapping delicately around his wrists but struggling to bloom with the drain of Pandora.

He knows he doesn’t make much of a physical threat. Certainly nothing compared to Red Chaos.

Even with him caught in the midst of a panic attack, apparently.

The bitterness is a distant thing, brushed off a bit impatiently because he doesn’t have time for it.

“I need him functional,” the Warden says finally. “You’ve got ten minutes.”

“You’ve got it!” Tubbo gives him a thumbs-up. “One functional Red Chaos coming right up!”

The Warden doesn’t acknowledge him, taking one step back, the end of the trident touching down against the ground as he takes up a guarding position with his back facing the wall.

But, most importantly, not staring a burning hole into Red.

Tubbo spins around with a breath of relief, blinking in surprise as he meets Ranboo’s wide panicked eyes, his arms wrapped awkwardly around Red Chaos in a mockery of a hug that is *not* being reciprocated, the Hero’s arms hanging limp and-

The envy flares hot for a moment of weakness, his gaze locked on the back of the Hero who is clad in a mockery of Siren’s iconic outfit, the sleeves too long, shoulders not quite broad enough to fill it out like it's owner.

A backpack sits flat where the smile with the crossed-out eyes would be on his hoodie and it makes his heart squeeze uncomfortable as he draws a breath, slowly letting it out, centering himself.

So this is what you’ve been reduced to without Dream.

The thought is, perhaps, a cruel thing but the truth of it is hard to ignore as he stares at the Hero dressed up in a Villains outfit in the midst of the most secure prison in the world, half-slumped against Ranboo and struggling to come down from a panic attack.

Tubbo remembers being fifteen, eyes wide on the television screen with the live recording from a shaky camera phone from a civilian bystander as Red Chaos hands wrapped bloody around the handle of the same trident that now lowers to point to the ground.

Screams and shocked shouts, someone laughing, the camera remaining surprisingly steady on Hero even amidst the ruckus.

"Pinned like a bug," someone had giggled as Red Chaos convulsed, choking on blood coughed up behind his mask, no one making a move to help him.

Tubbo remembers the helplessness, palm pressed up against the television screen, pleading with him to *get up, just get up, you've got this.*

The fury at the people who had done nothing but watch, flashes from phones bright, the news reporters drroll tone-

The lack of *care*.

The sound had cut off in the next instance and Tubbo had frozen, on his knees in front of the television, hand slowly lowering as he heard the remote being thrown aside, Schlatt dropping down on the couch behind him, followed by the tell-tale sound of a cork being pulled from a bottle of red wine.

On the screen Dream had finally arrived, no doubt shouting orders as he dropped to his knees beside Red Chaos, Enforcers stepping in to force back the crowd to a blurry and abrupt end of the recording, leaving him staring at a looping short clip of Red Chaos being stabbed in the background of a studio and a smiling host with pearly white teeth.

Tubbo hadn't moved as he listened to the wine being poured, trying to judge the man's mood from how much was being poured, but unable to look away from the television screen.

"The worst mistake you can make in this business is to think people care." Schlatt had said, glass filled nearly to the brim before putting the bottle down heavily. *"Look upon your future, kid. We're nothing but entertainment and headlines for the weak."* His eyes had reflected darkly in the television screen as he raised his glass to his lips. *"Even the strongest of us will never truly be free as long as we stand on pillars built on envy and admiration alike."*

For all his faults, Schlatt's bitterness was something he had understood, and couldn't exactly fault him for. Tubbo had watched the way the public was so easily swayed, those on the top of the world losing favour within the drop of a hat.

And now Schlatt was using it in his favour in a bid to reclaim the spot as the Number One Hero.

The man had always been clever, Tubbo has to give him that.

"Help me," Ranboo stresses out, voice pitching high, jerking him out of his musings.

I don't think you're the one who needs help right now, Tubbo thinks to himself, chewing the inside of his cheek thoughtfully.

“I turn my back for five minutes and you’re already making friends?” Tubbo asks with a laugh, wiping a sweaty palm discreetly against his jacket. “Almost enough to make a man envious.”

Ranboo’s expression goes flat.

Fix this, Ranboo’s look tells him, one hand patting nervously against Red’s back, his own shoulders hitched up to his ears.

In a minute, Tubbo promises him with a look back, holding up a finger, and Ranboo’s brow furrows but he nods, watching him with a little tilt of his head.

Anticipation burns in his chest because there’s too many coincidences, too much *sense* in how the pieces slot together with Tommy going missing and Red Chaos’ stumbling steps back with Wilbur on the screen-

It could have been because of Dream. He can’t ignore that. But-

What-if. The thought burns inside his chest as stares at the back of the person Schlatt had wanted him to be. *What-if they are one and the same?*

A lost boy with too many secrets, desperately codependent and with wary hostile eyes but who had still gone out of his way to *help* when asked.

Who denied being a hybrid but had smelled of *cat*.

And it’s such a clever thing, really. No one would be looking at Red Chaos and think that he’s a *child*. A mere *teenager*, not even old enough to legally drink while being a veteran in the business.

No one would associate Tommy with the Hero who had stood in Dream’s shadow because that would have meant he was fourteen when the Warden buried his trident through him, fifteen as he kept saving lives, facing down those much older than him and getting up over and over again even as the world spit at his feet and mocked his loyalty by calling him a *dog*.

Red Chaos, envied and respected, mocked and adored-

To be a man and a child alike in the eyes of the world?

The irony is almost too good. Too *perfect*.

Tubbo grasps for the scraps of his powers, wrestling against the constant slow drain from Pandora, the vines around his wrist quivering before burying into his skin and his eyes flares yellow as he feels the scents in the air change.

Molecular Basis of Odor Detection in Plants. It had been an old book he’d found on Schlatt’s collection- about fauna, the speculations on how plants picked up and released scents, he’d devoured it hungrily and, well, Tubbo had never been shy of *experimenting*.

He draws a deep breath as he steps closer, his lips parting to taste the air as the world grey scales around him, leaving particles bright in the air, scent trails that glitters purple around Ranboo and-

He frowns, wrinkling his nose and shaking his head to try to get rid of the cloying scent of *Techno* that's clinging to Red Chaos, emanating from the piglin arm that had replaced the one he'd lost, the pink particles in the air around it heavy but-

Tubbo squints, staring at the red that stains Red's sleeve, looking strangely like it was *dripping*.

Ice crawls down his spine and he rocks back on his feet, something prickling at his neck, a warning he ignores as he stares at it, unable to look away, and-

He draws a next breath and abruptly gags on the heavy taste of *rot*, jerking back, the vines slipping out of his skin and the world settling back in colour with a dizzying *snap*, an animalistic kind of primal fear pinning him in place between one breath and the other as he stands frozen in place.

Slowly it drains out of him and he lets out a breath with a *whoosh* before he slowly raises a hand, pulling his sleeve up, watching the vines ash and wither, his mouth twisting as his thumb brushes back a beading of blood.

"Your nose is bleeding." Ranboo's voice is hushed and nervous, strained, and when Tubbo glances up at him it's to see ears pinned back.

"Oh." Tubbo flicks his tongue up his lip, tasting iron. "It is," he confirms with some surprise.

"I can hear both of you," Red mutters into Ranboo's chest, his voice pitching different inside Siren's mask. "If you bleed out like a dumbass, when I dragged myself in here to get you out, I'm pissing on your grave."

"You'd go through the trouble of burying me? I'm honoured."

"*Die.*"

"Seems a bit counterproductive from what you just said--"

"Judge." Ranboo's voice is strained and Tubbo's mouth snaps shut.

"Right." Tubbo shakes his head and steps forward. "The mission. So- Red Chaos, *my friend*, we're on a time limit here so I really need you to pull yourself together--"

"*That's now how it works,*" Ranboo exclaims, scandalized.

"- preferably before anyone sounds the alarm," Tubbo continues, undaunted, clapping a hand against Red's shoulder with a squeeze and feeling the muscles bunch painfully tight beneath his palm.

"Not your *friend*," Red bites out with a hoarse dislike.

Tubbo tries not to let the smile stretch too big on his face.

He might be right. He might be wrong. He can't tell for sure without his powers but-

"Sure, *Bossman*."

Nothing wrong with operating under assumptions, really.

-

Tommy stares at the prison cell door, half of his attention on the Warden who had stopped abruptly to kneel down without a word, glove removed and fingers dragging finely over the obsidian.

They're taking some *weird* fucking paths and he doesn't like it.

Likes the lack of Enforcers even *less*.

"You-"

"Touch me and I'll stab you," Tommy bites out without looking and Ranboo yanks his hand back. "I'm fine," he adds with a wary glance at the other teenager. "Just- fucking leave it alone."

He looks back at the prison cell, fingers twitching uncomfortably.

No window, just a slot for a tray to be slid inside with food.

The inhumanity of Pandora had always put his teeth on edge but before Bad had slipped the power dampener around his wrist he hadn't thought there was another way to keep those with dangerous powers away from those outside.

Even so, Pandora would never be *good*. A necessity, arguably, Tommy was personally responsible for locking up several Villains inside and it's not something he can ignore.

Part of the system.

He breathes out roughly- gaze dragging over the ceiling.

He very deliberately doesn't look at Ranboo. It's for the better. Techno wouldn't approve of him killing him for giving him a *hug*.

The humiliation of it burns, now that he's more coherent, twitchy and fighting the feeling of wanting to crawl out of his own skin.

Tubbo isn't much better. Tommy can fucking *feel* the way the shorter teen keeps watching him and it makes his tail flick in annoyance, itching to swat at him.

There's not even a window to throw himself out to escape the whole fucking mess and so he's left staring at the dark walls, one hand reaching up to press down against the golden ring

and feather, feeling them against his skin.

A loud clang makes him jerk, eyes darting to one of the cells across the hall.

“I can *hear* you,” a familiar voice laughs with a rattle of the small metal slot, light fur-covered fingers bending out with familiar claws at the end. “There’s *someone* in Pandora who doesn’t belong here-“

“I’d pull those fingers in if I were you, Antfrost,” Tommy mutters, turning to slouch his shoulder against the wall. “I still got a good aim.”

“That you Red?” The disbelief is stark and Tommy huffs a small breath.

“In the flesh.” He raises a brow. “I didn’t know you got caught.”

The claws do a little row of *tap-tap-tap* against the metal before drawing inside. “Made a small mistake, a week or so ago, I think – hard to tell time in here- but it was a bit of a wrong place, wrong time situation if you catch my drift.”

“Sure,” Tommy says flatly. “You said the same thing after you tried to bash my head open.”

“I told you I was aiming for Dream!”

“Cats *are* colour blind,” Tubbo adds *very unhelpfully* from the side and Tommy shoots him a look that gets him an innocent spread of palms back.

“Not completely,” Ranboo adds a bit absently, staring curiously at Antfrost’s hands, paws, *whatever*. “They can see yellow and blue-“

“Don’t care,” Tommy interrupts, folding his arms and drawing them uncomfortably tight before turning to the Warden. “You done-“

His mouth clicks shut as the Villain rises abruptly, moving onwards without another word, leaving the three of them to stare after him.

“I guess that’s a yes,” Tubbo states.

“*Clearly*, ” Tommy agrees with some bite, pushing away from the wall and moving onwards before Warden got any bright ideas about *getting them himself*.

“Hey- Red.”

He pauses, glancing back at the firm metal door.

“If you see Velvet about- tell him I’m sorry, would you?” A little laugh, claws tapping a bit anxiously. “I- I really didn’t mean to get him into this mess.”

Tommy’s mouth twists but-

“*Fine*, ” he forces out reluctantly.

“Thank you!” Antfrost calls after him, hollow and echoing from his cell. “And sorry for almost bashing your head in!”

“*Sure you are,*” Tommy mutters under his breath, rubbing a hand uncomfortably against his neck, shoulders stiffening as he glanced aside to find Tubbo staring right back at him.

“That was a kind thing to do.”

“I *will* kick you.”

“Don’t be embarrassed,” Tubbo laughs, the sound a strange thing inside these walls. “It’s not a bad thing!”

“Guys, we’re kinda falling behind-“ Ranboo points out just as Warden turns around and Tommy nearly stumbles, instincts wanting him *away*-

Tubbo’s hand wraps around his wrist, yanking him forward instead, and Tommy only *just* curbs the response to lash out, forcing his legs to catch the motion forward instead with a small stagger.

His palm gets twisted up and an apple crammed into his stiff fingers, distracting him even with the gold of the armour getting closer, the skin of it bright red instead of the green he usually bought.

“I meant to make an apple pie,” Tubbo tells him in an undertone and Tommy’s head snaps to him, staring into brown eyes that meets his steadily. “But I guess I can buy some new ones later.” A small grin, visible for a moment in the mouth of the ram mask, before the other teenager turned away, waving to the Warden. “We thought we heard some Enforcers, false alarm!” he lies in the next beat.

“Y-yeah,” Ranboo fumbles out, tugging at his suit jacket. “Just making sure, *mmhmm*.”

Tommy valiantly doesn’t twitch at the blatantly *bad lie* with the long stretch of the corridor behind them.

The Warden stares all three of them down and Tommy pulls the apple closer to his chest, the tips of his fingers digging into its flesh.

“Stay close,” the man says finally. “No further than ten steps behind me.”

It’s a warning and an order at once.

Tommy’s skin crawls with dislike, baring his teeth behind his mask, glowering darkly as the Warden turns his back to them.

The day I follow someone like you, Tommy decides with feeling as he rolls his stiff shoulders back, *is the day I stop being Red Chaos.*

Chapter End Notes

Red Chaos meets his biggest fanboy, gotta love that for him (Tommy is, in fact, not loving it).

And he got a hug, a proper one (and maybe, for a moment, eyes closed, he imagined those arms belonging to someone else entirely, but that's between you and me).

This chapter kicked my ass, but I finally got it sorted out and ready to post, hah. Taking the W today.

We get ever closer to a chapter I've been highly anticipating to finally write, it's so close it's making my fingers itch. *Can't wait.*

Thank you all for all the endless support, amazing comments, hype and art, it's truly something.

Hope you're having a good one, wherever you are out there in the world<3

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If you're interested there's a [Hush Now Discord](#) that tends to go *brrrrr* with the theories in designated channels and also have a lot of fun chatter and chill people on top of scoops of chaos with my lovely mods<3

There's also a Hush Now Index created by me and Isa, and you can access it in the "Hush Now Index" channel on my server for those of you who are interested! Hella shout-out to Isa for the incredible work she put into it<3 It looks amazing.

You can find me on **tumblr** here: [corpse-art](#)

And I'm also on **twitter**:

main: [corpsey_art](#)

alt (where i just post prompts): [corpseyreads](#)

I post a one hour countdown on all my social medias for a new chapter update if you're interested in such a thing :)

-

DUDES. We have new Hush Now art!! They're all amazing. Go and give them all so much love<3

(And if I ever miss linking your art- pls let me know!! I try to make sure I keep track of everything but I am but human)

[but i got chu by PlantChecker/a> art](#)

[support your local hero and chug it like you mean it \(hero branded drink designs\) by NoasTea/a> art](#)

[hush now doodles by rattrodent/a> art](#)
[FANART MASTERPOST](#)

Chapter 52

Chapter Notes

tw for claustrophobia this chapter

Tommy - Red Chaos

Heroes:

Dream - Dream

404 - George

Valorant - Sapnap

Royal - Eret

Rose - Hannah

Schlatt - Schlatt (formerly Judge)

Villains:

Angel of Death - Phil

Blood God - Techno

Siren - Wilbur

Warden - Sam

Lethe - Ranboo

Judge - Tubbo

Jester - Quackity

Nemesis - Niki

Eris - Eret

Vigilantes:

Faux Pas - Fundy

Chronos - Karl

Kitten - TinaKitten

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy rubs his fist against his palm, using the pressure to ground himself as the Warden stops *again* with a gesture for them to stay back.

Ranboo presses himself back against the wall beside him and promptly slides down, knees sticking up awkwardly, a miserable picture with a damp patch growing on the white button-up.

“It’s hot,” Tubbo complains, tugging at his jacket with one hand and dropping the other wrist on Ranboo’s head, half-slumping against him.

“You’re wearing a winter jacket inside a place filled with lava,” Tommy side-eyes him. “I’m surprised you haven’t got hyperthermia.”

“He’s got a point,” Ranboo groans, tugging at the knot of his tie. “I feel like I’m gonna *melt*.”

Tommy’s lips thin but he doesn’t comment, staring at the *goldgoldgold* of the armour, knuckles grinding into his palm, fingers straining to flex and teeth chewing down on the inside of his cheek.

What are you doing?

Smoke wafts through the vents in the Warden’s mask, slithering through the air before disappearing, and Tommy tightens his jaw to the point of pain.

“You said you made Pandora what it is today.” The Warden stills and Tommy takes a step back, slouching back against the wall and burying his hands into the pockets of Siren’s coat to hide their trembling. “How come a Villain was involved in all that?”

“I wasn’t a Villain then,” the Warden answers after a moment, motion bleeding back into the stiff stature like figure as he bent forward, clearly doing *something* on the wall and Tommy doesn’t like it.

His eyes stray to the three gleaming points of the trident sticking up over the man’s shoulder and he digs his heel in, pressing his shoulders harder against the wall.

“Did you know that it was going to become all this?”

“*Red-*” Ranboo’s voice is low and anxious and Tommy ignores the small tug on his coat with a roll of his stiff shoulders.

“Or did you think you were contributing to the good of the world?”

“I was following orders,” the Warden says, voice impossible read, steady and clear in the empty hallway. “That shouldn’t be such a foreign thing to you, *mutt*.”

Tommy twitches, something rotten gnawing at his core, an ugly mix of hurt and want to hurt in turn.

“You fuck-“

A hard yank on his tail, the sharp flare of pain making his knee fold with *clack* of his teeth as the back of his head hit the wall, palm slamming back against it to steady himself.

He slowly turns his head, meeting innocent eyes and a little wag of Tubbo’s fingers.

“I like dogs,” Tubbo says with a curl of his lips, putting more weight on Ranboo as he turned to prop both wrists on top of his head. “Even though they make me sneeze.”

“I’ll show you *sneezing-*” Tommy grinds out, pushing away from the wall.

“I saw that you visited my old bedroom.” Tubbo says abruptly, stuffing a hand into his pocket and rummaging around before finally pulling out a familiar piece of paper, the one Tommy had found in Schlatt’s tower, folded and caught between the knuckles of his index and middle finger. “I have to say, I don’t quite understand why you brought this along of all things,” Tubbo muses, eyes on him.

Tommy stares mutely at the folded piece of paper.

“It’s yours?” he asks slowly, flicking his gaze up.

“Drew it myself,” Tubbo agrees and the grin on his face settles into something darker as his lips pull up to bare teeth. “Did you look at it?”

“No,” Tommy admits slowly. “I didn’t- there was a lot going on-“

Tubbo flicks it to him and Tommy’s hand snaps out instinctively, fingers curling harshly around it with a crumpling of the paper.

“I tried to get your phone as well,” Tubbo says with a little shrug, swaying as he put more weight on Ranboo, forcing the other to compensate with a squawk of protest. “But someone got there before me.”

“It’s not like they can get into it.”

It was a clever design- a single swiped pattern on the screen and his phone would switch from normal to mission, locking everything down, replacing the background with a plain blue one framed in red, and sealing it tight with a ridiculous password that had taken Tommy a solid week to memorize with a fucking hidden pattern in the corner to even be allowed to type it in.

He’d always been careful to activate it whenever he was in gear, it was just second nature, and this time had been no exception.

“404?” Tubbo asks in interest and-

“Yeah,” Tommy admits with something numb in his chest as he stares at his clenched fist, slowly lowering it down at his side. “You worked with Schlatt,” he states.

“And you worked with Dream.” Tubbo tilts his head, something glittering strangely in his eyes. “The Number Two and Number One Heroes.”

“You were never out on the field.” Tommy would have noticed- Dream kept a close eye on Schlatt and so had he in turn. There’d been no record of Schlatt working with anyone, but then- there’d been no record of anyone living with the man either and Tommy isn’t sure he would have believed it if he hadn’t seen it with his own two eyes.

A child’s bedroom in Schlatt’s tower.

Only- the child, it turned out, was older than him and Tommy doesn’t quite know what to do with that information.

He tucks the folded note into the pocket of his pants.

“Never got that far,” Tubbo admits with a shrug. “I got out, all thanks to Jester. I had no interest being a Hero, and even less interest in being *that man’s* sidekick.”

“And now you work with the Syndicate.” The words tastes strange, somehow, and he feels distant as he stares at the other teenager- older than him, made to fill the same kind of role, only-

Schlatt instead of Dream.

His fingers ghosts down his left arm where the gnarly twisted burn wraps tight from Schlatt’s whip.

“Not officially.” Tubbo lifts his shoulder in an easy shrug. “In time, perhaps, if I want to, but I’d rather just stay away from the whole Hero and Villain thing.”

Tommy snorts, rocking on his feet with a single step taken back and a slight turn away from the other.

“Says the person in the midst of Pandora.”

“This is personal,” Tubbo says simply.

“Why Schlatt?” Tommy asks abruptly, neck prickling with a look at the Warden at the sound of something going *click-click-click*.

There’s a stretch of silence, where Tommy takes another step back, trying to angle to get a look-

“I’m going to make one thing very clear, *Red Chaos*. ” Tommy whips back around to Tubbo, his chest expanding harshly as he stares into brown eyes that burns into his. “I didn’t *choose* to work with Schlatt.” The words are flat, mild, a warning in the other’s voice that’s hard to ignore. “It would be correct to say that I was not given a choice, you understand me?”

Tommy clenches his jaw. “Understood.”

“Good.” Tubbo nods his head once, a smile sneaking back over his lips, and Tommy feels a chill run down his back, staring at the perfectly crafted mask that looks so *easy* on the other’s face. “What about you, Bossman?”

“What?” Tommy asks distractedly.

“Did you choose to work with Dream?”

Tommy gives him a blank look before the realisation dawns and-

“Dream is *nothing* like Schlatt,” he bites out sharply, skin prickling at the very *implication*-

“You sound a bit *defensive* there, Bossman.” A stretching smile that speaks of nothing good.

“I’ll *offensively* shove a fist into your face if you don’t shut your fucking mouth,” Tommy snarls, hackles rising.

Ranboo lets out a nervous laugh. “I really don’t think this is the time-“

The Warden rises up, and Tommy’s head immediately snaps down, staring at the wall where nothing looks out of place, obsidian the only thing staring back at him.

His heart burns, frustration wiring tight.

He can’t take on Warden and he’s got two teenagers he gotta get the *fuck* out of the prison.

He can only hope that Jester and Nemesis are still in their cells.

“Damn,” Tubbo sighs, pushing away from Ranboo with a small wobble of his steps, caught quickly, thick green jacket half-way unzipped, sweat dripping down his throat to soak into the shirt beneath it.

Tommy looks to Ranboo, tall and lanky, clearly faring the worst out of them under the chokehold of Pandora, powers no doubt draining fast with his hybrid features being so extensive.

Hybrids had always been more sensitive to Pandora. It’s why Tommy hadn’t been surprised when Techno elected to stay behind, especially with whatever bullshit made him switch between the pretty man he’d seen at the Watson household and the near full-bloodied piglin that he’d stood beside in the Pit.

He flexes his fingers, looking to the Warden, who looks remarkably untouched by the drain which-

Fuck.

Tommy abruptly slaps his palms against his cheeks, blowing out a harsh breath.

Step One, he thinks to himself, *reality check*.

He jerks a hand down to Ranboo with a twist of his mouth, ignoring the surprise in the other’s eyes as he focuses his attention on Tubbo who had paused, arms stretched up over his head, watching him carefully.

There’s two who are the clear lesser evil here.

“We need to go,” Tommy says shortly, refusing to break eye contact even as he feels long fingers hesitantly curl around his, his own tightening in response to pull the taller to his feet before hurriedly snatching his hand back.

“Thank you,” Ranboo says with an exchanged look of surprise with Tubbo who shrugs.

I’m responsible for getting them out.

“Stay close,” he forces out, hesitating but-

One of them has potential useful knowledge and training.

Watch my back, he signs crudely with stiff fingers, waiting with a bated breath.

Tubbo regards him for a moment longer before he grins sharply, shaggy brown strands brushing over his eyes behind the holes of the ram skull as he steps back with a quick- **got it** in response.

“Stay in the middle,” Tubbo says in a low voice, nudging Ranboo forward as he passes him by.

“Here?” Ranboo asks nervously, inching his way closer to Tommy.

It’s a painfully slow compartmentalization, like rusty cogs that won’t cooperate, an itch beneath his skin and knowledge that he’s lying to himself as he puts himself ahead, closest to Warden whose hand goes for the handle of the trident with a glance back.

“We need to go up, right?” he says in a low voice, shakings out his fingers with a twisted grimace of teeth behind his mask. “Whatever Enforcers are left in Pandora are going to be ahead.”

“There’s a path that will take us directly to the upper floors,” the Warden answers after a moment.

“Does Eris know about it?”

“No.”

Right. So that was still an issue.

Lovely.

“So,” Tommy asks when the other makes no move to volunteer any more information, “where to?”

The Warden’s head tilts very slightly to the left and then his bare hand raises, palm pressing against the wall beside him, and Tommy jerks as the obsidian drew back into itself with a harsh noise to reveal an opening just tall enough to let the Warden through without ducking.

Like it had been made just for him.

“Pandora is my creation.”

Tommy glances warily at the Villain whose gaze he feels prickling at his skin.

“Right,” he musters out, peering into the darkness. “That’s- *handy*, I guess.”

The Warden says nothing, turning and stepping through, and Tommy swallows before taking one determined step forward, and then another, having to duck to get inside just as the Warden touches something on the wall that sends a row of lights in the ceiling flickering to life with a dull little rumble that whirrs like a distant ominous sound.

The corridor is not very big and it makes his skin crawl, blinking dizzily for a moment before he draws a sharp breath, remembering all too well the way tight crawl through the ventilation shafts in Schlatt's tower-

"Right behind you," Ranboo says, way too close, and Tommy jerks a step forward.

"Right," he mutters with a shake of his head

For now he has no choice but to play along, to wait for an opening, a moment to act-

Warden's hand drags along the wall before pausing, moving down, two fingers hooking and pulling with a *click* and a small tight tunnel opens up with a *clack-clack-clack-clack* of stones that rings like an endless thing with the echo of it.

Tommy stares at, a numb sort of horrified realisation slithering through his veins.

"Red Chaos." The Warden's voice is a foreboding thing. "I'll guide your path."

"You're joking," Tommy blurts out. "How the hell do you-"

A hand wraps around the handle of the trident and Tommy's mouth snaps shut, teeth tearing through the skin on the inside of his cheek, tasting blood with the clenching of his jaw.

"You'll do this," the Warden says, slower, more dangerous. "Or you're standing in my way."

Fuck you, Tommy thinks, curling trembling fingers tight as he glowers back. *You sonofabitch.*

"I can go," Tubbo volunteers suddenly, at Ranboo's side, one hand on the taller's arm as he peers past him. "I'm smaller, I'll fit more easily-"

"Red Chaos will go," Warden cuts him off, leaving no room for argument.

Behind them the door to the corridor slides shut, leaving them trapped with a harsh grinding noise of stone that shakes the ground, gravel falling from the ceiling to pitter-patter against his shoulder.

"I'll go," Tommy forces out with a harsh twist of his mouth.

He shrugs out of his backpack, shoving it into Ranboo's arms. "Don't lose it," he bites out, heartbeat loud in his ears, hesitating but unstrapping the escrima sticks and stacking them before shrugging out of the coat and dumping it on top, leaving only Siren's gun strapped to his thigh.

Lastly he unlaces the boots and removes the socks, balling them up to cram them into the shoes.

He twitches when Tubbo reaches forward, back half-squished against the wall to fit beside Ranboo, palm down and thumb folded against it.

Tommy flicks his gaze up and meets Tubbo's eyes, steady on his, keeping it as he offers up his shoes in a dismissive motion, his fingers curling around two round things, one metal and one smooth, that they trade without a word.

He pockets it with a small motion disguised, palms sliding down and pressing against his thighs as he straightens up.

"I want those back," he says, the tremble barely kept out of his voice, heart pounding inside his chest.

Don't let him leave me in there.

"Of course, Bossman."

Tommy spares one last traded look with Tubbo, nodding shortly before turning back to the Warden.

"I'm ready." Pandora is warm against the soles of his feet, except the small patch of pink skin on the heel of his foot.

"One wrong path and you'll activate one of the traps." Tommy crouches down, staring into the endless darkness, thick enough to swallow him whole. "You'll want to listen closely."

-

He shoves Siren's mask forward with a scraping noise.

Tommy strains and squirms, using his toes to push himself forward, the small flashlight Tubbo had snuck him caught between his teeth, making a miserable job at shining the path ahead.

He's sweaty, it drips down his forehead, soaking the white button-up shirt that is tearing against the obsidian stone, offering no protection against the nicking at his skin as it snags on sharp little edges.

His shoulders are wedged tight, fingertips inching forward beside him with each pull, Siren's mask scraping with a horrible sound that makes goosebumps rise on his skin.

It's hot, the air heavy, and he counts his breaths carefully, shoving against the panic that threads thick beneath the surface.

He squints into the little spot of light, the split at the end, blinking against the sweat dripping into his eyes.

"Right on the eight," he mutters to himself with a tremble of his voice he struggles to ignore, squirming forward, wrapping his fingers around the bend and dragging himself with a grunt,

muscles straining and toes digging in as he folds himself in an awkward pretzel like shape, feeling his shoulder tear.

He shoves Siren's mask forward, feet pressing against the wall to push himself the last bit around the bend.

"And then- up on the ninth," he murmurs, counting the steps off with twitches of his fingers.

He can't get a hand forward, shoulders crammed too tight, so instead he has to twist awkwardly, flashlight shining up, caught in his corner teeth as he squints against the dust and dirt and fine gravel.

He draws a snotty breath through his nose, eyes stinging as he stares up into the firm obsidian ceiling above him.

Carefully he forces himself back on his front, ribs expanding with each breath, a tremble running through him.

"It'll- it must be ahead," he tells himself firmly, inching fingers inches ahead, toes pressing down as forces himself forward. "It's fine-"

He makes the mistake of sucking in a harsh breath and he chokes on a cough that only sucks down more dry dust, flashlight clattering to the ground, tasting the gravel particles with each rattling heave, forehead pushing against the stone, head spinning and air whooshing too fast down his lungs to trigger a new coughing fit and-

He struggles, yanking hard on his left hand until he can twist his head, biting down hard on his wrist, the pain wiring sharply through his system as he clamps his eyes shut, knees knocking against the obsidian before he locks his muscles tight.

Mouth shut, tasting blood that he swallows to sooth the dryness, breaths regulated through his nose with a forced calm.

He rides it out until the panic is forced back down and his heart doesn't feel like it's trying to tear itself out of his chest before slowly prying his teeth out of his skin, leaving the skin wet with drool and blood and puncture wounds that bubbles to bleed down his skin.

I need to get out of here.

He swallows, ignoring the taste if metal on his tongue. "Up- up on the ninth," he repeats to himself, voice strained, the words feeling thick and clumsy in his mouth as he bends down, lips drawing back to pick the flashlight up delicately with his teeth.

A small jerk sends it back to the corner of his mouth and he twists his hand, having to claw at the fabric of his pants to finally grasp the small white crayon Tubbo had given him, wrist straining to draw a shaky X on the wall in the tight space.

Carefully he uses his index and middle finger to tuck it back, double checking with several awkward pats to assure himself it was in place before turning his attention back forward.

He shoves Siren's mask forward with a scraping noise.

-

Ranboo glances nervously down at Sam who stands, the end of his trident against the floor, guarding the opening of the small space Red Chaos had squeezed himself into.

The Hero's clothes are wrapped tight in his arms.

Or maybe it was more accurate to say that Wilbur's clothes were, the coat smelling of a strange mix of sweat, nicotine and blood that itches at his nose.

He draws them closer, tail twisting to wrap around Tubbo's ankle with a nervous little flick against the leather of his boot.

"It's been thirty-two minutes," Tubbo tells him in a low voice before he can open his mouth, arms folded and leaning back against the wall beside him.

Ranboo had quickly grown tired of the awkward half-crouch he'd been forced into and slid down to sit on the floor, his knees sticking up awkwardly despite his feet being wedged up against the opposite wall but Tubbo-

Tubbo had always been stubborn and the moment Red Chaos had disappeared he'd taken his own kind of guard, different from Sam's.

The exhaustion is overwhelming and as he spreads his fingers out in front of him he can't even reach enough of his power for a single spark.

"You think he's okay?" he whispers.

Do you think we'll be okay? he doesn't ask, fingers finding a strap on the backpack and curling it around his finger, fiddling nervously.

"Yes," Tubbo answers without hesitation and-

Ranboo's shoulders eases down, just a bit.

He tips his head to the side, letting it rest against the side of Tubbo's hip, against the thick fabric of his winter jacket.

"You can remove it, you know," he murmurs. "No one will judge you."

Tubbo lets out a small laugh. "Maybe I'll *Judge* myself."

"Ha ha, funny guy." Ranboo flicks the edge of his tail against him chidingly. "One day, you'll pick a name that is entirely yours."

"Oh?"

“Mmhmm.” Ranboo nods his head. “Something like...” He rubs his thumb against the backpack strap, brows dipping in thought. “Something like, mmm...”

“I’m sure to send people scrambling in panic when *mmm* arrives on the scene-“

Ranboo pinches the inside of his knee, making sure to use his nails, and Tubbo yelps, smacking a hand flat against his mask.

He angles his head, peering up through the fingers half-splayed over the holes for his eyes.

“Had something more to say?” Ranboo challenges, wagging his fingers threateningly.

“You’re such a prick,” Tubbo laughs. “Fine, fine- what do you think would suit me then?”

Ranboo hums, reaching up, grasping Tubbo’s hand in his, turning it thoughtfully.

Tubbo’s fingers are short and strong in comparison to his own, scars stretching pink and jagged, the side of it pink and shiny from a burn scar.

It’s rare to see them free from the make-up Tubbo used to hide them as a civilian but Ranboo can’t judge him for it.

“Remember the first flower you made for me?” he asks, thumb dragging down the burn scar.

“Coreopsis?” As he speaks the word a single dainty vine blooms from him to curl around Ranboo’s index finger, a bud forming and slowly folding out in a bright yellow, red stretching out from the middle. “*Always cheerful,*” Tubbo murmurs, staring down at it.

“It suits you.”

Tubbo’s hand slips out of his with a *snap* of the vine, leaving only the flower that Ranboo catches gently, bringing it close to his chest.

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Tubbo says roughly, twisting to plant his back against the opposite wall, raising his palm. “If you’re talking flowers a yellow carnation would suit me much better.” The flower rises up, the yellow bud unfurling in a layer of petals that Tubbo’s fingers closes tight around, crushing it. “I was nothing but a *disappointment* to that man,” he breathes out.

The flower crumbles between his fingers as his hand falls at his side, wilting and turning to ash before touching the floor.

“L’Manberg won’t be free until he’s dead.” Tubbo’s fingers clenches tight in a fist. “*I won’t be free.*”

He laughs, an eerie light sound as he raises his hands, covering his face.

“It’s been years and still I can’t escape his hold on me, it’s pathetic.”

“It’s not,” Ranboo disagrees, shaking his head. “You-“

“Do you know the strangest thing, Ranboo?” Tubbo interrupts him, fingers sinking into the holes of the ram skull, dragging it off and turning it to stare down at it. “I feel lost without him,” he confesses with grin. “Like-“ A tremble of his lips before they twist into a grimace. “Like I don’t have a *purpose* anymore.”

“Then give yourself one.”

Tubbo raises his eyes from the white skull with the curling black horns and Ranboo manages to keep his gaze for a moment before averting his eyes, focusing on his nose.

“Give yourself a new one,” Ranboo presses, fingers curling tight in Siren’s coat. “Like me. You know me, my allegiance isn’t with L’Manberg, it isn’t with the Syndicate, it’s with the people that helped me.” A wobbly smile. “Like you. My purpose- it’s *you*.”

Tubbo’s fingers curls around the jaw of the skull. “I can’t be,” he says hoarsely. “I refuse to be anything like *him*-“

“You’re nothing like Schlatt,” Ranboo interrupts, jerking his chin up. “I *chose* to be your husband-“

“*Platonic* husband,” Tubbo corrects automatically before the corner of his mouth twitch a bit helplessly upwards. “For *tax purposes*.”

“Is there any finer foundation to build a lifelong friendship on?” Ranboo challenges.

“All good things must come to an end eventually,” Tubbo protests with a disbelieving laugh and a shake of his head. “Even us-“

“Then enjoy it for as long as you can.” Ranboo stretches his hand out, turning it with his palm up to reveal with the small delicate coreopsis. “You’re the strongest person I know.”

Tubbo slowly sinks down against the wall opposite him, the skull in his lap.

“*Liar*,” he says but- to Ranboo’s relief a small smile curls his lips. “I still want him dead but-“ He holds up a finger. “I’ll think about it.”

“Oh you’ll *think* about it-“

“Don’t push it, ‘Boo.”

-

Tommy claws himself out the last bit only to fall and land roughly on his shoulder before sprawling out on his back, heaving desperate freeing breaths.

“Fuck.” He drags an arm over his eyes, lips trembling and eyes burning. “*Fuck*.”

His chest heaves, a wretched sort of broken laugh escaping his mouth before he drags a palm down to muffle it until it tapers off and his shoulders stop shaking.

He lets his hand fall limp on the floor, sucking in a harsh breath before letting it out.

“I want to go *home*.”

Chapter End Notes

warden minding his business while ranboo and tubbo are having a Serious Talk:

meanwhile tommy is just straight up suffocating in the walls, poor guy, if he didn't have claustrophobia before this- (he did, this experience did not improve it)

you guys aren't ready for what the future holds, strap in tight and hold on because i'm on a roll

thank you all for all the endless support, amazing comments, hype and art, it's truly something.

hope you're having a good one, wherever you are out there in the world<3

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If you're interested there's a [Hush Now Discord](#) that tends to go *brrrr* with the theories in designated channels and also have a lot of fun chatter and chill people on top of scoops of chaos with my lovely mods<3

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[what if they're one and the same by rattrodent/a> art](#)
[DON'T LOOK AT ME by GraphX77/a> art](#)

[FANART MASTERPOST](#)

Chapter 53

Chapter Notes

i had this chapter done hours ago, why am i adding this 4 minutes before posting pls-

Tommy - Red Chaos

Heroes:

Dream - Dream

404 - George

Valorant - Sapnap

Royal - Eret

Rose - Hannah

Schlatt - Schlatt (formerly Judge)

Villains:

Angel of Death - Phil

Blood God - Techno

Siren - Wilbur

Warden - Sam

Lethe - Ranboo

Judge - Tubbo

Jester - Quackity

Nemesis - Niki

Eris - Eret

Vigilantes:

Faux Pas - Fundy

Chronos - Karl

Kitten - TinaKitten

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy doesn't allow himself long to recover before he rolls himself over and uses his wrists to push himself up slowly with a grunt as he finally stumbles to his feet.

The flashlight is shining a dim thin stream of light and he steps carefully towards it, squinting into the heavy darkness as he crouches down cautiously to snatch it up.

He finds Siren's mask after a moment of searching and slides it back on his face, securing it, breathing harshly through its metallic voice changer.

It's then, and only then, he starts looking around, flashlight mapping out the box of walls he finds himself in.

“You’ll find yourself in a square room. On the wall on the left you’ll find a small red light but it won’t be visible unless you’re standing immediately in front of it.”

Tommy directs the flashlight away from the wall in question, taking a slow step forward, fingers reaching out to touch against the obsidian, dragging along it as he methodically makes his way down it.

It takes him a second swipe to locate it, at Warden’s eye height, and he huffs a breath of relief.

“Paranoid bastard,” Tommy mutters to himself, pulling off his glove, pressing down on either side of it and feeling the stone give with a scraping noise that makes a shiver crawl down his spine.

In the next breath there’s a rumble and Tommy takes a hurried step back, flashlight shining over the ground as it splits in two directions, opening up to reveal a pool of dark murky water that makes his nose wrinkle.

He waits until all sound has ceased before he cautiously inches his way forward, lowering himself down on one knee and dipping his bare fingers into it with a shiver.

It’s strangely cold, the hair on his arm rising up, and it shouldn’t be possible with the heat of Pandora but-

It’s not like he can fucking ignore the reality of it.

There’s a scent to it and he swirls his fingers, stirring the grit and gravel in it, grimacing because-

“Stagnant water.” Not a good sign but not surprising either. “I don’t even wanna fucking know what’s in it.” He mutters to himself, dropping down on his ass and inching his bare feet over the edge, watching as they sink into the dark waters.

“You’ll have to go down until you find the path and then just follow it.”

He wiggles his toes before realising the water had soaked through the hem of the pants and promptly yanking them up.

“No fucking way I’m walking around Pandora in wet clothes,” he grumbles to himself, pushing up with one hand, tugging off Siren’s gun and fumbling to unbuttoning his pants. “It’s not like anyone can see me anyway,” he tells himself, yanking them down and promptly kicking them off with small jumps as they tangled around his right ankle before he stepped down on the fabric to yank himself free.

Tommy unbuttons the white button-up shirt, discarding it aside, skin prickling uncomfortably as he drags the beanie off and throws it beside it along with his gloves before re-strapping Siren’s gun around his waist and thigh.

He puts the flashlight and crayon by the pool before grasping the edges, lowering himself down with a sucked breath as the cold water rose up his chest, stomach muscles tensing and

toes curling in discomfort.

“Fucking hell,” he gasps, shivering as he sunk down to his neck in it. “This bitch *cold*.”

It’s a strange kind of taunting- his throat dry from heat and dust, the water cool around him, saliva pooling in his dry mouth in response before he swallows it down.

“Later,” he promises himself. “I’ll find something to drink *later*.”

The cold prickles and stings where his crawl through the tunnel had torn his skin but the worst offender is the bite mark on his shoulder and the stitched hole in his thigh from the Pit.

It’s an uncomfortable reminder of his own humanity.

“This better not get me infected with some weird shit,” he mutters to himself.

It takes him a moment to regulate his breathing, but he levels it out carefully, slowing the beating of his heart with two fingers pressed to his pulse point, before drawing a lung full of air and sinking beneath the surface of it with a push to send himself down into the depths.

“Take a deep breath and keep to the right wall once you’re inside of it. Make sure you don’t lose it.”

He twists around, firm strokes taking his deeper, eyes firmly closed shut.

Even in the dark he lucks out, finding the underwater path quickly and feeling his way through it, his tail trailing through the water behind him with little flicks to the side to aid his path forward once inside it, one palm plastered securely against the wall to keep track of his path.

Nemesis power would have been really handy just about now, he thinks to himself with a snort of bubbles, grasping the bend and kicking his feet, the water wrapping around him from all sides.

He brushes his left palm up for only a moment, feeling the ceiling above, no room left for any air pockets, before shifting it into a firm stroke.

He counts one minute, two, by the third his chest is starting to ache and he exhales in relief as he finds a wall ahead before reaching the fourth minute, following it up until his head breaks the surface with a gasp he angles downward to not accidentally suck in any water.

Tommy drags a hand through his hair, wiping the water away as best as he could from his eyes before daring to open them.

“You’ll find the light switch on your left.”

He grasps the edge, heaving himself up, boxers clinging uncomfortably tight and water dripping down his skin as he bends forward, shaking his head roughly.

He slowly straightens up, shifting his tail with an absent flick to rid of the water that clings to the tuft of it.

The heat of Pandora suddenly doesn't feel so oppressive, wrapping almost comfortably around him as he paws his hand blindly out until he finds a lever, hand wrapping tight and dragging it firmly down while ducking his head behind his arm.

The light flicks on with a rumble and he forces one eye open, peering cautiously over his arm before dropping it, blinking once, twice as his eyes adjusted to the dim brightness.

He peers around warily, eyes widening as he took a step forward and then another, halting.

“What the *fuck*-“ he breathes in disbelief.

Screens crowd up in front of him, each of them split in eight in grainy black and white live feeds, on a curved desk with a single chair placed in front of them.

He counts fifty before giving up, dragging the chair around and dropping into it with a kick of his bare foot that sends him rolling right up to them.

There's live feeds from cells, from corridors, his eyes dragging over Enforcers standing guard, pausing at a swaying familiar figure carrying out a dance for two all on her own, his heart knotting tight before he forces himself to look away, searching, and-

Tommy presses his fingers against the screen depicting the form of Nemesis, lips trembling as he drinks the sight of her with a horrible sort of relief, forehead dropping against the plastic of the screen, fingers curling around it.

“Oh thank *fuck*,” he breathes with a small laugh that rings hollow, layered with more emotions than he wants anything to do with.

He notes the number on her screen as he leans back, eyes scanning over her where she sits leaning against one of the walls, one knee drawn loosely to her chest, wrist resting on it, the other leg stretched out in front of her.

It's impossible to tell anything more of her state, her chin resting on her chest that he can see rising and falling as he squints against the pixels.

Alive. Likely asleep. There was only so much one could do to pass time inside Pandora with the draining of it sapping all energy of those inside of it.

He double checks, triple checks, frowning as he leans forward for one last desperate search but finding no sign of Eris or Jester.

Tommy leans back, the leather of the chair clinging uncomfortably to his wet skin, but he ignores it as he throws one foot up on the desk, and then another, brow knitted as he looks around and-

Drawers crowd all around, papers stacked tall, some spilled out on the floor, as if something had been taken in a hurry and left the otherwise pristine area a mess.

Mounted on the wall is the apparatus the Warden had described in detail, unmistakable with the many buttons and levers and the small screen with a string of red digits that means nothing to him.

Pandora is big. He can only guess that Jester, if still inside it, had simply been placed in a cell where there was no monitor.

Eris- could just be well hidden but, *fuck* if he knows.

The other could just have been smart and ditched Pandora all together.

Annoying for him but fuck, there's a certain kind of giddiness in that at least Nemesis were still there.

He hadn't crawled through that shitty tunnel for *nothing*. He has real clear evidence that at least one Villain was still inside this hell hole and he has a shot of getting her out of it.

To help her as she had helped him.

It still leaves him the problem of Warden and his eyes drifts slowly over the screens, past prisoners, past Enforcers, and-

Tommy drops his feet to the ground, rolling closer to squint into one particular cell, the screen just two steps from Nemesis' own, and he stares at the strange shine against the dark obsidian and the spots of white that *could* be feathers, scattered strangely on the floor.

The camera is angled towards one corner of the room, leaving plenty of space behind it for someone to be out of view, and his heart thumps dully inside his chest.

It's a possibility.

A *maybe*.

A maybe that doesn't hint at anything particularly good as he stares at the could-be-feathers in what could-be-blood.

The number on the screen reads 5821.

He propels the chair back from the desk with a spin and halts it in front of the machine on the wall and-

From the corner of his eyes he catches sight of the papers scattered on the floor.

Tommy flicks his eyes between the papers and the machine before he makes up his mind, bending down and raking the papers up into a pile, using his toes to drag out one that had slipped under one of the metal cabinets.

He pauses as he sees something just slide off it and he slips off the chair into a crouch, putting the papers aside in a neat pile, pink fingers disappearing beneath it to feel around before finding the small square and pulling it out, turning it around and-

It's an old photograph. Creases from folds that had been carefully flattened out, the edges rounded from wear and in the middle of it there's a small blotched spot from water damage.

There's two boys in the picture, preteens, one with green hair and a mask on his face, small scales patterning up his skin, and familiar golden eyes against a sclera of black. The other- his eyes closed, skin a warm brown, a red, yellow and black balaclava pulled over his head, fabric creasing in what is impossible to mistake for anything but a grin beneath it.

Ponk has his arm thrown around Sam's neck, dragging the taller down to squish their cheeks up together, and the golden eyes aren't looking into the camera, instead they're focused on Ponk, a familiar crinkling of the corner of Sam's eyes that speaks of a smile.

The photo is old, harried by time, but clearly well loved, and Tommy slowly turns it around.

On the back of it there's a date noted and smudged, with a childish *SAM AND PONK* scrawled in black marker below it, making it some thirty years old.

At the very bottom there's a carefully printed row of much neater, almost mechanical, letters that read: **I will set you free**

Tommy turns it back around, staring at the little crown that had been drawn slanted on Sam's head, a red heart doodled above them both, faded with time.

He doesn't realise he's heaving for breath before he lets it go from trembling fingers, palm flattening over his mouth, clawing off Siren's mask with a clatter as it hit the ground, nausea crawling thick like sludge through his body with a cold tremble as he gags, tripping back and missing the chair with a slam of his elbow against it as he hits the ground.

Cold, wet and miserable and wearing nothing but boxers inside the most secure prison in the world- trembling because of a fucking *picture*.

He snorts and it turns into a laugh, legs stretching out in front of him and shoulders shaking as his back bends in a curve forward, drops of water dripping from his hair.

He laughs and laughs until he's sobbing, snot and tears dripping down his face, and his fingers claws into the skin above his heart because it hurts it hurts it *hurts* and there's no one to see him fall apart.

"Why did it have to be *you*." The photo lies by his foot, a mocking reminder of the man he had found a place of safety away from the world with the scent of cookies and a fluffy white dog. "It wasn't meant to be *you*, Sam."

It's not fair, it's not fair, it's not *fair-*

Being human is an ugly affair, the Blood God's voice wraps around his bones and his head snaps up, staring at himself reflected back in the monitors of hundreds upon hundreds of prison cells, shuddering too-fast breaths heaving his ribcage. ***Life isn't fair, whelp.***

"Shut up." Tommy's mouth twists in an ugly snarl of pain and grief, arm scrubbing roughly over his eyes. "You don't know the *fuck* you're talking about-"

Of course I don't, the Blood God's mockery drips and slides through his veins. ***I'm only in your head.***

"Is this what you do to Techno as well, huh?" Tommy wipes the back of his wrist against his nose, smearing it thick with snot. "You- you just fucking lurk around waiting for the first opportunity to, what, *belittle* him?" The anger that pools through him is an ugly rotten thing. "Do you get a kick out of it?" he challenges with a laugh that doesn't sound like him. "Who of us is truly the *miserable* one-"

Tommy's world lurches and he has no warning before he's tumbling into a field of poppies, air torn out of his chest as his shoulder slams into the rot, the stench of death and overwhelming thing as his he pushes down, fingers sinking into the ground with a sickening *squelch* as he rolls himself onto his back and-

A giant hand slams down, dwarfing him and pushing him deeper into it, red poppies bending towards him and the Blood God towering over him, a hazy creature with a big gaping jaw of teeth that opens above him, wide enough to swallow him whole.

You forget your place. The God's voice wraps around him, the stench of his breath spilling over him with its wet heat as Tommy claws into his hand, panic wiring through his veins like electricity as he kicks his legs with futility. ***Do not misplace your anger when I've shown you nothing but mercy.***

"Fuck you-" Tommy heaves out with the last air in his lungs, twisting furiously his instincts blaring with something primal and overwhelming. "Fuck you, fuck youfuckyou-"

Calm yourself. A snort, warm against him, the hand easing back just enough for him to draw a desperate sucked breath. ***You've worked yourself into quite the state.***

"Fuck you-" Tommy chokes out, tears prickling. "I didn't ask for this-"

Such is the price of being alive, to draw air, to have your heart beating inside your chest. There's a shift, a blurry shape that he can't focus on, fabric fluttering on the edge of his vision and great big red eyes burning into his so clear that it makes his own ache. ***To be alive, to be human, never knowing what your next step will take you.***

"Fuck you." His lips trembles. "All I wanted was to stay with Dream."

He who abandoned you? The God's eyes burns into his with judgement. ***Your loyalty is admirable, for all that is misplaced.***

"I don't wanna hear shit from you," Tommy snarls hoarsely, the ground wet and strangely warm against his bare shoulders where he lies. "Dream earned my loyalty and I'm *sick* and fucking *tired* of people looking down on me for it!"

The God hums, rows of teeth closing down to draw up in a mockery of smile that sends primal terror down his veins.

Oh you're such a curious little thing. A laugh that makes him want to claw his eyes out, rattling through his very being. ***An annoying, ignorant, thieving-***

"I'm *not* a fucking *thief*-"

-insolent, desperate, the God drags the word out, ***foolish little curiosity. Truly, an endearing little whelp-***

"I'll *bite you*," Tommy snarls.

The God laughs, the ground shaking as it sunk down, rattling his teeth as fingers buried into the rot around him before lifting him high into the air, leaving him dangling like a weak kitten, swung almost idly with the God now beneath him.

He feels like he's gonna vomit.

You could not hurt me if you so tried.

Too many teeth beneath him and Tommy wiggles and squirms, clawing up the God's hand that turns, tumbling him like an ant on a child's unforgiving palm.

This is my domain and around your wrist is my claim, my mark, my brand.

"I've cut my arm off once," Tommy heaves out, shoving his bare shoulder up against one curving finger, so entirely inhuman to the touch that his brain protests against it. "I'll fucking do it *again*-"

Empty words. You know as well as I do that doing so now would only hinder you. A grin as the hand shifts, palm suddenly gone from beneath him, leaving him clawing to remain on the finger that lowers down as the God's maw opens beneath him.

Tommy stares into the void, an eternal blackness, fingers slipping before he remembers himself, swinging his legs up to wrap them tight, chest heaving.

You need me, the Blood God purrs with a pleased and satisfied rumble that crawls through him to rattle his very heart.

"I don't fucking *need* you," Tommy snarls back, hackles raised, and-

LIAR

The word slams into him and Tommy's fingers and legs slips, his entire body going numb, falling only to be caught by his tail, teeth stretching up in a long row around him where he dangles inside the jaws of the Blood God himself, lowered deeper and deeper, something horribly chilling freezing his veins and eyes wide as he stares into something not meant for human eyes.

Around his wrists the God's brand sizzles and burns and beyond the panic and pain the wrath bubbles feral and intricately indignant.

“I DON’T NEED YOU!” The words echoes inside the jaws of the God, a desperate furious thing. “SO *FUCK OFF!*”

YOU’LL REGRET THIS

He finds himself pulled out, pain tearing through him and the world a horrible blurr, red below him and approaching fast and he doesn’t have time to brace for impact only-

He slams into himself, back in Pandora and it’s abrupt overwhelming and sweltering heat, his back colliding hard with the wall with a clack of his teeth as he hits it bruising force.

YOU’LL COME CRAWLING BACK TO ME, JUST LIKE THE REST

Tommy gasps, only to cough, fighting to suck air into his lungs, trembles wrecking through his body, sweat dripping from his brow as he hunches forward, fingers tangling desperately in the ring and feather around his neck with white knuckles.

He laughs, a barked thing of ugliness.

“You think you’re so high and mighty but you forget yourself, just like everyone else, just like the *humans* you look down on” Tommy wheezes out, teeth baring in a vicious grin as the brand around his wrists fizzles and burns before slowly fading back into its dormancy. “This dog *chose* his loyalty you stupid *fuck.*”

There’s no response, the God gone, leaving just Tommy, and the back of his head collides against the wall before turning slowly to stare down at the photograph still on the floor.

At Sam. Young and smiling. An ugly reminder of the human behind the dark visor of the Warden.

“Why did everything have to get so complicated,” he wonders bitterly and-

There’s no one to answer him, a silence that reminds him achingly of his apartment, before Wilbur.

Tommy breathes out and closes his eyes, picturing the raccoon and wolf Wilbur had painted side-by-side in the midst of Pogtopia on his bedroom wall.

Remembering- the sound of his voice, the story read to him, the fucking *endearing* curses that had appeared through it as Wilbur had dropped something during the recording of it, or tripped, sometimes trailing off to mutter to himself as he painted before remembering what he’d been doing.

The effort he’d put into it just to make Tommy feel less lonely.

Wilbur who was just as messed up as he was, different and yet the same, both of them selfish to the core.

“I wish- I wish I could have told you everything, man.” It’s a strange kind of regret because he’d never *wanted* to share parts of himself to anyone but Dream. Not before Wilbur. “Then

maybe... maybe it wouldn't have gotten to this point."

He lets his hand drop from the tangle of the ring and feather, shifting his attention to stare down at his pink hand, the tips of his fingers stained black.

"I killed someone." He imagines Wilbur right there beside him as he flexes his fingers carefully. "I didn't- I don't regret it." A pause. "I should- I think. Or well... I guess I feel bad about it for the wrong reasons because- all I could think was *what about Dream*. Will he hate me? I mean... he tried to break the rule first but-"

Tommy bites down on his lip.

"I don't. I don't know if Caribou really would have killed Techno but- you would have been *sad* if your brother got hurt."

A brother not by blood but by name, claimed so easily on Wilbur's lips.

Tommy blinks. "I don't- I don't want to see you sad."

He thinks of the way Wilbur would throw his head back when he laughed, a wild sort of freedom in it, like it couldn't be contained inside of him.

Thinks about the way Wilbur's arms had wrapped around him, his nose burying into that ridiculous yellow sweater.

"I don't know what I'm doing." He digs the heel of his palm into his cheek. "I don't- I don't think I'm *fine*, Wilbur."

He huffs a small breath, turning his gaze up above him, mouth twitching before he lets out a small laugh.

"I can't believe I yelled *fuck you* to a God while just in my boxers." He blows out a harsh breath. "Fucking ridiculous stuff, man."

Tommy sighs, drawing his knees up, circling his arms around them and dropping his chin on top of them.

He feels... not *lighter*, but less... less like he's about to fall apart at a single look from the Warden.

"I've got so many issues," Tommy groans, dragging his chin down and dropping his forehead on his knees. "This ain't normal."

He misses being just *Tommy*. Toms. Whatever fucking ridiculous nickname Wilbur had rattling around in his stupid brain.

"This sucks," he mutters. "Fucking *Sam*. Who the fuck just tortures someone, huh? I told him- I told him I didn't know shit." His teeth sink into the skin on the inside of his cheek. "I'm glad I resigned." He snuffles. "Serves him right, the fuckhead. Idiot. *Prick*." He draws a

snotty breath. "Fran- Fran fucking deserved better, man," he says decisively, scrubbing the back of his wrist against his nose.

He shakes himself roughly.

"Enough of this shit." He slaps his palms against his cheeks, squishing up his lips. "You've got this." His palms slides forward, covering his mouth. "Those idiots aren't saving themselves so you gotta pull yourself up by the bootstraps."

His gaze falls on his bare feet.

"... Metaphorically. Or some shit." His brows crinkles as he pushes himself to his feet. "How the fuck is someone supposed to pull themselves up by the bootstraps anyway," he huffs, bending down and snatching up the photo before slapping it down on the desk, gaze lingering before he turns it over with a sigh. "Maybe... it just wasn't meant to be," he mutters softly to himself.

He drags his thumb over the words on the back.

I will set you free

"Kinda wish things didn't turn out this way, big guy." It feels strangely like good bye as his hand slides away from it, turning his back to it. "I'm sorry."

He locks his gaze on the machine.

"All you need to do is pull the third lever on the fifth row and it will open a path-"

"Yeah, no." Tommy's mouth stretches in a sudden grin that bares too many teeth. "I think it's about time we start doing shit *my way*."

A drop of water slides from his hair to hit his bare back as he reaches forward, arms enfolding and bracing against every single lever.

"Time everyone remembers just *who* they're messing with, right, *Sam*?"

He heaves them down, putting his entire weight into it with a grunt and a stumble as they gave away abruptly, his chest heaving.

He turns, bending down to snatch up the mask, securing it onto his face as he makes his way to the monitors, eyes drinking in the sight of the now wide-open cells as he slams his palms down on the desk, baring his teeth as the sirens of Pandora starts blaring above and around him, his tail swishing with anticipation.

"I'm *Red Chaos*, bitch!"

Tommy finally got a moment to process some things- not in the neatest of ways but sometimes things just line up that way, aye? Gotta take things into your own hands.

We are rapidly approaching the end of the third arc and after that we will be on the fourth and last one. Woof. Are you guys ready?

Thank you all for all the endless support, amazing comments, hype and art, it's truly something. Warms my heart and makes me endlessly soft. The life you guys brings to this world of Hush Now is a wonderful thing to behold.

Hope you're having a good one, wherever you are out there in the world<3

-

If you're interested there's a [Hush Now Discord](#) that tends to go *brrrr* with the theories in designated channels and also have a lot of fun chatter and chill people on top of scoops of chaos with my lovely mods<3

There's also a Hush Now Index created by me and Isa, and you can access it in the "Hush Now Index" channel on my server for those of you who are interested! Hella shout-out to Isa for the incredible work she put into it<3 It looks amazing.

You can find me on **tumblr** here: [corpse-art](#)

And I'm also on **twitter**:

main: [corpsey_art](#)

alt (where i just post prompts): [corpseyreads](#)

I post a one hour countdown on all my social medias for a new chapter update if you're interested in such a thing :)

-

DUDES. We have new Hush Now art!! They're all amazing. Go and give them all so much love<3

(And if I ever miss linking your art- pls let me know!! I try to make sure I keep track of everything but I am but human)

[First Kill by In_fernal_MC art](#)
[FANART MASTERPOST](#)

Chapter 54

Chapter Notes

Tommy - Red Chaos

Heroes:

Dream - Dream

404 - George

Valorant - Sapnap

Royal - Eret

Rose - Hannah

Schlatt - Schlatt (formerly Judge)

Villains:

Angel of Death - Phil

Blood God - Techno

Siren - Wilbur

Warden - Sam

Lethe - Ranboo

Judge - Tubbo

Jester - Quackity

Nemesis - Niki

Eris - Eret

Vigilantes:

Faux Pas - Fundy

Chronos - Karl

Kitten - TinaKitten

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy pauses as he hears a noise of grinding stone behind him, slowly turning his head towards the now open corridor staring back at him.

His tail stills.

“... Maybe I should have grabbed my clothes first.”

-

Fuck, fuck, fuckety fuck fuck shit-

The prison siren blares loud and obnoxious, ringing and bouncing inside the walls, and his eyes widens as he spots a particular Villain ahead, upping his pace and lurching forward to

slam his shoulder into them as they took their first step out of their cell.

They hit the obsidian hard, head snapping up with dark gleaming eyes that makes his skin crawl with the memory of struggling furiously for air-

“YOU-“

Tommy lunges for the door.

“Not you! Nope, nope, nope!” The sludge-like Villain that had nearly killed him slams against the door just as he drags it shut, locking it with a hard yank and a slam of his palm against the manual lock to make sure it was secured. “Sorry, not dealing with you today!”

“LET ME OUT!”

“In your dreams!” Tommy shouts over his shoulder as he leaves them behind, his gaze flittering over familiar and unfamiliar faces and-

Surprise, shouts, confusion-

It’s a sad sight. Bedraggled prisoners, some struggling to stand, others pushing forward with stumbling steps, gaunt haunted looks turned towards him.

He tears past them easily, his bare feet slapping against the ground.

“Who-“

“Where’s his clothes-“

“Are we- free-?”

There’s cells he tears past where the prisoner inside of it are still huddled up, cells where the doors had been pulled back shut to lock them back inside of it.

A woman he passes by is barely standing, trembling with every step, palm against the wall as she painfully made her way forward, sweat dripping from her forehead and face twisted in a painful grimace that looks to meet his eyes for a moment before he tears his gaze away.

Tommy nearly misses the half-hidden staircase, twisting on his heel, palm catching on the edge to heave himself towards it and up in a spiral and-

A gun meets him at a turn and Tommy is already going down as it goes off, letting the forward momentum bring him up on his palms, twisting to slam the back of his heel into the bend of the prisoner’s legs.

They go down face forward and Tommy’s feet hits the ground just in time to see them slam face first into the steep stone stairs, tumbling down them with a clatter of the gun behind them to disappear into the darkness.

“Ouch,” he mouths to himself with a wince. “Idiot,” he tacks on as he turns his attention ahead.

He has to step over the body of a dead Enforcer near the next door out, his bare feet feeling the heat of the warm blood that had spread in a pool around them, grimacing to himself as he discreetly wiped it down against the obsidian.

He peers out and down the corridors on his right and left, tail flicking behind him as he scanned the area carefully.

“Fuck, where are they-“ He’s still only in his boxers, Siren’s gun strapped to his thigh, and he grimaces to himself as he takes a step out and blindly takes a left with a glance over his shoulder only to slam into two Enforcers at the first turn.

Literally.

They go down in a tangle of limbs, Tommy twisting as gloved hands make a grab for him and slamming his head back with a hard *crunch* of a nose breaking against his skull only to get the other Enforcer on top of him and-

“- under arrest-“

He twists, hands grappling to pin him down, but he gets his knees between them and shoves violently with a hard bend of his body, left foot hitting the ground a second later, his right slamming into the fucker’s throat.

Tommy pants, scrambling to his feet and shaking himself out, the adrenaline rushing hot through him with the pounding of his heart and tail swishing behind him as he flexes his pink hand.

“Damn,” he huffs. “Not even stopping for a chat beforehand? *Rude.*”

“You’re under arrest.” His eyes flicks down to the Enforcer who lies half-sprawled on their side, voice little more than a warble with fingers twitching, stretched out towards him.

The other is eerily still, blood seeping from below the edge of their mask to drip down their throat.

Tommy frowns, stepping forward to crouch down beside the first, head tilting as he reaches out to lift the rim of their hat.

Blank eyes stares back at him and an cold sort of shiver creeps down his spine as he tugs it entirely off.

He’s never seen an Enforcer without the golden mask that slots up over their mouth and nose, or the proper cap tugged low to shadow their eyes.

Obedient, there to help Heroes do their jobs, and guards inside the prison of Pandora.

“Identify yourself,” he demands.

There's nothing particular about the Enforcer, nothing that stands out, and he's never bothered to pay them much attention.

Brown hair, early twenties perhaps, and grey eyes that stare into his without comprehension.

"Enforcer 402-D. Position assignment: Pandora." The words are delivered after a small twitch, as if *rebooting*, and Tommy's mouth twists behind his mask.

He'd forgotten how fucking *weird* the Enforcer protocol were.

A part of him wants nothing more than to let them go, to get going, *he doesn't have the time-*

But the *offness* is staring into his eyes, undeniable and blaring and the excuses for it feels frail with everything that has been hitting him in the face for the last few weeks.

"Enforcers are only there to offer backup for Heroes, to keep civilians safe and out of the way so Heroes can do their job."

Crowd control. Always quick to act when Heroes had given them a command, silent and watchful and waiting to be directed.

The Enforcers breath is wet and wheezing through the golden mask on their face and their eyes doesn't veer from his.

He bends closer. "Hey, man, you got a name?"

Blank eyes stares into his.

"The Hero commission does a lot of horrible shit," Tommy mutters to himself, fingers twitching, his mind working a mile a minute. "There's- Dream mentioned that there were those that, they didn't make the cut with the-"

His palm flattens against the back of his own neck, the alarm ringing blaring and obnoxiously loud around him as his gaze slowly falls on the brand around his own wrist.

Tommy grabs their coat abruptly, tugging them into their stomach with a shift to pin them down with his knee as he grasped the back of their coat, yanking it harshly down and-

He stares at the God Brand of XD burnt into their neck, the scars around it old, faded.

Unchallenged.

He lets go of them abruptly.

"You are under arrest-" A wheezed wet warble from a crushed throat and Tommy swallows, stepping back, his skin crawling like ants beneath it but-

He pauses, scrubbing a palm roughly over his eye.

"Yeah," he forces out gruffly. "You got me. Good job."

He flicks his gaze around, stepping away from the Enforcers and clenching his jaw tight with a glance back before setting his path onwards.

“I hate this,” he growls in frustration that wires hot, flicking his tail. “Fucking- just how much bad shit was going on right in front of our eyes?”

There’s no one to answer him.

“This is what we were trying to change,” Tommy tells himself, a furious sort of thing as his pace picks up, bare feet slapping against the floor. “*This* is why you’re needed Dream, god-fucking-damnit!”

-

A shout and a familiar nervous voice make him abandon the right path with a twist on his heel to take a left, not losing momentum as he took in the situation ahead of him and-

Ranboo, shoulders pressed back against the wall, a vain attempt at making himself small with Tommy’s things hugged tight to his chest, a prisoner grasping the white of his button-up to drag him down, mouth moving furiously and-

Tommy collides against them shoulder first, a bend of his body making sure if hit hard against the soft ill-protected part of their solar plexus, their feet lifting from the ground only to hit it hard on their back with a clack of their skull against stone, sliding several feet to come to halt in a limp mess that does not move.

He turns to Ranboo, wide-eyed and staring at him in shock.

“Red-!?” Ranboo squawks as Tommy wraps his fingers around his wrist in a tight grip.

“The fuck are you doing here all on your own!?” Tommy snaps, setting off in the opposite direction, dragging the taller teenager along.

“Where are your clothes, man?” Ranboo splutters.

“In your arms,” Tommy grits out, peering into the first open cell, finding no one inside of it and dragging Ranboo into it with a small shove, pulling the door shut behind them.

Ranboo takes a step back, clothes and backpack and weapons hugged awkwardly against his chest, still staring at him as Tommy turns towards him.

Bare in all his scarred glory, tail behind him and piglin arm in place where his own had been.

Tommy knows how he looks. The thick webbing on his back from failed wings, the wrap of scars around his left arm from Schlatt’s whip, the handprint low on his lip where Sapnap’s hand had burned hot to keep him from bleeding out on the ground-

The bitemark on his shoulder where tusks had torn into his skin, stitches still on his thigh where ice had pierced deep, the scar on his chest where the Angel of Death’s talon had torn into him, gun wounds and the tridents sharp points that had gone all the way through him-

It's his weakness painted for anyone to see and the shame that floods through him flares into anger.

"Take a picture, it'll last longer," Tommy grits out, stalking forward and snatching his things out Ranboo's arms, dropping them haphazardly to the ground and crouching down.

"I didn't--"

"*Sure* you weren't," Tommy mutters sarcastically, digging out the backpack and planting his ass on the ground, drawing it close to unzip it. "Where the fuck is the Warden and Judge?"

"I- I um, lost them," Ranboo admits with a swallow. "You--"

"*What!?*" Tommy snaps, eyes locking into mismatched green and red ones. "Spit it out--"

"... Your hair dye is gone," Ranboo tells him in a small voice, eyes moving everywhere but to meet his as Tommy glowers at him. "There's- there's still a little patch of it but--"

Tommy's hand darts up, fingers brushing against his still damp hair.

"I went for a swim," he says shortly, shoving a hand into his backpack and dragging up a pair of pants, staring at them and then, slowly pulling them closer, thumb dragging over the fabric.

Reinforced, not identical but close enough to what he'd worn as Red Chaos at Dream's side.

"*Chronos sends his regards.*" That's what Eret had told him as they threw it to him.

Tommy puts them aside with a twist of his mouth, pulling out a pair of sneakers next, white and accented in red, a black undershirt, proper gloves, and then--

His hoodie, the sleeve cut off just above where the axe had gone through, replaced instead with a neon green echo of Dream's, the fabric soft.

The smile he'd painted stares back at him as he holds it up, a strange kind of mix of emotions bubbling inside of him as he slowly lowers it down, dragging it against his chest, brain buzzing and alarm blaring around them inside the prison of Pandora.

Ranboo slowly lowers himself down in front of him, tail curling limp at his side and hands clasped tight.

Tommy stares at them, at the black and white skin, mismatched and odd.

Not too different from his own, in a strange kind of way.

He reaches up, using the back of his knuckles to pop the brown lenses out, one at a time, dropping them to the ground and scrubbing the back of his knuckles against them to get rid off some of the lingering dryness.

Sleeping with them in the Pit had been a shit idea.

Ranboo watches him quietly and then-

“I might be wrong- I don’t think I am but-“ Ranboo’s voice is a low hush, sucking in a breath, letting it go as Tommy meets his eyes, gaze held this time. “*Tommy?*”

He stills.

“It- it is you, isn’t it?” Ranboo continues, voice low, a tinge of anxiousness, of disbelief. “It’s- your hair and eyes and- Tommy disappeared and then it was you and- it *is* you, isn’t it? You’re-“ A breath. “You’re *Wilbur’s Tommy.*”

And-

Tommy doesn’t *think*.

Between one breath and another he’s got Ranboo pinned to the floor beneath him, straddled over his chest, hand wrapped around the other’s throat- pupils blown wide and lips drawn back to bare teeth behind his mask.

He knows. The words wires like a live hot wiring through his brain. *He knows, he knows heknowsheknowsheknows-*

No one can know.

No one.

His heart beats too fast inside his chest, ribs expanding with each harsh breath, fingers twitching around the throat in his grasp but-

“I’m not telling anyone.” Ranboo doesn’t move, his hands raised, the back of them flat against the ground above him and Tommy wrestles for sanity beyond the panic. “It’s- it’s not really my secret to tell anyway, right?” The soft flesh of the throat bobs beneath his palm. “I wouldn’t do that to you.”

“So what *will* you do, huh?” Tommy’s voice comes out hoarse, hackles raised as he leans closer. “And don’t fucking say-“

“*Nothing,*” Ranboo breathes out and it sounds so fucking *earnest* that it startles a barked laugh out of him, bitter and sharp.

“Sure,” Tommy snorts, feeling the other’s slow heartbeat against his palm, a distracting kind of oddness because there’s no frantic pounding panic, unlike his own. “And you’re not going to waltz up immediately to Tubbo and tell him *all* about how Red Chaos is some fucking *kid-?*”

This time it’s Ranboo who stills and Tommy realises his mistake with a twitch of his tense muscles, his mouth snapping shut and teeth sinking into the inside of his cheek.

Dumb.

Such a dumb fucking mistake.

“Did you just- you know about *Tubbo*- no, *no* you knew- you *knew*-“ Tommy makes no move to stop Ranboo from reaching to drag the mask off his own face, baring a perfect split between white and black, thin ears flattening back as mismatched red and green eyes darts over Tommy’s face. “You don’t look surprised,” he says, disbelief thick.

He’s got little dots patterning out from his nose, like *freckles*, Tommy thinks a bit distantly as he watches Ranboo’s head hit the ground with shock clear to see in the way his mouth opens and shuts, brows knitting together.

“All this time- no, it can’t have been, you-“ Ranboo laughs weakly. “I’m- I can’t wrap my head around this because Wilbur was- and then you were- and.” His mouth shuts, what little colour in his cheeks draining out. “For how *long*?” he asks, a quiet kind of horrified realisation reflected back at Tommy in the red and green.

Red like Red Chaos.

Green like Dream.

There’s a part of Tommy that wants nothing more than to *shut him up*. That wants to silence him forever, to erase any danger of the knowledge of his identity in the wrong hands.

The very reasonable part of him knows that it’s a line he has no interest in crossing, not even for Dream, but-

He *could*.

It would be so *easy*.

But Caribou’s surprised expression burns in the back of his mind, the axe embedded deep in his skull, the *blood*-

Ranboo didn’t deserve that. Not for *this*. And Tommy’s skin crawls because- Ranboo’s arms are still raised, making no move to defend himself, his life entirely in Tommy’s hand, wrapped around his throat.

How much are my secrets worth? The thought comes unbidden, unwanted. *How far will I go?*

Tommy forces his grip to loosen, to push up and take a step back, turning his back to the other before he does something he’ll end up regretting.

He drags a hand over his face, scrubbing it roughly against his eyes before breathing in, out, hand sliding down to detach Siren’s mask and letting it clutter to the ground.

“You’re telling no one,” Tommy bites out with a dangerous look at the other who is slowly drawing himself into a sitting position, hands still up in the air. “And if I find out you’ve told *anyone* I’m gonna make you fucking regret it.”

“I won’t. *Honest*. I promise.” Ranboo slowly draws his ridiculously long legs into a crisscross position, hands up for a long moment before cautiously letting them fall. “We good?”

I hate you, Tommy thinks.

It’s not entirely true. He thinks, hand dragging self-consciously through his fringe, tugging it down to stare at the strands that had gone back to their normal blond colour.

Not safe for hybrid use my fucking ass, he thinks with a tired sort of resentment.

“*Sure*. Absolutely fantastic,” Tommy mutters sarcastically, tugging at the strap of Siren’s gun and letting it fall to the ground.

Ranboo lets out a breath of relief. “Good. Good goodgoodgood.” There’s a moment of silence where Tommy snatches up the shirt, dragging it down over his head and tugging it firmly down, sparing a moment to straighten out the sleeves. “So- how long have you, um, known?”

“What does it matter?” Tommy crouches down by the backpack, rummaging around until he finds a beanie, that he puts aside, and a balled-up pair of socks at the very bottom.

He holds them up, staring at the red fabric that Karl had, for some *insane fucking reason*, decided to accent with little painted smiles in the style of his hoodie.

It’s not like anyone would be staring at his fucking socks.

Ranboo leans back, watching him with a strange look in his eyes. “It matters,” he says and-

Tommy doesn’t want to do this. Has no interest in being in this situation, the panic that claws ugly inside of him at the thought of someone knowing, far too aware how it could be used against Dream but-

“We’re not friends,” he snarls, hackles raised and shoulders hitched to his ears.

“I know.” Ranboo’s voice comes out in a hurry. “I’m just- it’s a bit surprising, I guess.” An awkward laugh that makes Tommy twitch. “Can you blame me for being curious?”

I can, Tommy thinks spitefully.

“I didn’t know *shit* until after Wilbur told me on the fucking live television.” Tommy pulls the socks on before reaching for his pants as Ranboo averts his gaze. “So, *no*, I didn’t know when I met you the first time, or the second time, if *that’s* what you’re thinking.”

“That’s not what I meant,” Ranboo shakes his head. “I was just- does Blood God-“

“I didn’t tell *Techno* anything,” Tommy interrupts, teeth baring. “And I sure as *fuck* didn’t tell *Sam*.”

He tucks the shirt into his pants before buttoning them with a brief struggle, his fingers trembling, before they latch in place.

"I guess- that must have been pretty shocking," Ranboo says a bit meekly.

"Understatement," Tommy huffs, folding his legs to drop down on the ground, reaching for the sneakers.

He pauses, bringing them closer, turning them and-

"So who does know?"

"You," Tommy says shortly. "And it's going to stay that way if you know what's good for you."

He finds the green smiley against the red on the outside of them, the brush strokes a neat copy of his own rough one.

There's such a thing as going overboard, Tommy thinks dryly, staring at them.

Still, it feels a bit like *forgive me*, and he can't hate it as he pulls them on, knotting the neon green laces tight with a brush of his thumb against them.

"Can I ask you something?"

"Will you shut up if I say *no*?" Tommy asks as he pulls his hoodie down over his head, relief bleeding through him like a physical thing as he throws the hood up over his hair.

There's a moment of silence. "Probably not," Ranboo admits just a tad sheepishly.

Tommy shoots him a *look*, raising an eyebrow as he slips on his beanie, adjusting the back of it with a push of his palm.

"You... don't have to answer it if you don't want to," Ranboo starts slow, cautious. "But why, um, why didn't you tell Sam that you were, well, *Tommy*?" A small sharp canine sinks into his bottom lip. "I don't know a lot, and I forget a lot of things, but I know that you two- you worked at Sam and Frans with him and I guess... I don't quite understand." A swallow.

"Surely he wouldn't have done that to you if he *knew*?"

"Do you know why he never unmasked me when he tortured me?" Tommy says after a long moment and Ranboo pauses, shaking his head slowly.

Tommy reaches out to drag Siren's coat towards himself, fingers diving into the pocket to pull out his mask. "These things," he says, knocking his knuckles against it, "isn't just to keep our identities secret." He spins it around, unlatching the teeth with a flick of his thumb, staring at the sharp rows of jagged metal teeth. "Masks- they reduces us down to our identities. It is, to be fucking blunt, a way to dehumanize us, even to each other." A beat. "Or perhaps *especially* to each other." He clicks them shut. "Who we are behind the masks only complicates shit. Sam knows that, and he didn't want to know who was behind the mask. And *I* didn't want him knowing who *I* was."

There's more to it. Things he doesn't want to put into words.

The cost of his secret, not for himself but for *Dream*, if people were to put the identity of Tommy and Red Chaos together.

The reality that he's not sure he could have lived with telling Sam and not have him *care*.

"Maybe it would have mattered, maybe it wouldn't have. I wasn't interested in finding out." He shrugs, slotting the mask over his face with a small *whoosh* as it sealed in place, and he leans back on one hand with a freeing breath of air through its vents. "At the end of the day I'm a Hero and he's not. Opposite sides, different ideals and goals and all that jazz"

"Oh." Ranboo gives him a complicated look, lips pursuing.

"What?" Tommy demands, raising a brow. "You're a Villain- or, well, a *Villain to be*, right? You should get it, or whatever."

"Not really, sorry."

Tommy gives him a dry look. "The fuck you apologizing for?"

Ranboo ducks his head. "I just- find it, um." A pause, where Ranboo looks everywhere but at him, the alarm still blaring around them both. "If- if being a Villain prevents me from being friends with *you* because you're a Hero then- I wouldn't want to be a Villain... I guess."

"... I can assure you that's not the reason why we're not friends."

"Dude. *So not the time*."

Tommy snorts, leaning forward to yank the backpack towards him, beginning to stuff Siren's coat inside of it only to pause, feeling something hard against his palm by the lapels of it.

"If you don't want to pick a side, then don't, fuck if I care." Tommy lifts the lapel up, staring at the drop of emerald in a delicate web of gold that hung from a small golden ring that had been sown into the coat. "Truth of the matter is that- people are always going to pick different sides because people *care*. Sometimes about stupid fucking shit but- they *do*."

He twists his finger around it and yanks it off, carefully brushing the threads away.

"Believing in something, caring about something- it's important to most because life is a fucking *mess* and not everyone is comfortable with just, settling down or whatever. Especially not with how shit is at the moment. Just take a look around you!" He folds the emerald inside his palm, glancing to the older teenager. "L'Manberg isn't some happy little family where everyone can go back to holding hands, history made damn fucking sure of it." He bares his teeth. "Our generation got the piss end of the stick and we're rubbing it in shit and pretending we're making it better."

Ranboo regards him silently, tail tucking tight at his side as he draws his knees to his chest, arms circling around them.

"There has to be a better way about it," Ranboo pushes and the naivety of it all makes Tommy's skin crawl. "Why do we choose sides? Why can't we choose people?"

“Because people stand on different sides,” Tommy says flatly.

“But what if they *didn't*. ”

“Sure, call me up if that ever happens.” Tommy reaches back, unknotting the string around his neck and sliding the emerald onto it, making sure to keep it covered by his palm until it was tucked beneath his shirt, right beside the feather and ring. “I don’t know about *you* but I wouldn’t exactly be fucking *eager* to stop and shake hands with someone who pinned me like a fucking bug on a stick and then spent two weeks torturing me for information I didn’t even have!”

He clenches a fist in his hair, tugging roughly to ground himself, his chest burning at the memory of Wilbur doing the same, long fingers tangled in a mess of brown curls.

“Don’t you think I want it to be easier, huh?” he demands, laughing, an ugly barked thing without joy. “Between Dream and Wilbur things are so fucking shit right now that I feel- I feel fucking turned upside down and inside out and all I can fucking *hope* is that they both make it out *alive*.” He levels Ranboo with a dark look. “You can preach about hope and dreamy idealism but choosing *people* means choosing a *side*.”

“That’s not true.”

“And if the Heroes were targeting your Tubbo, hm?” His mouth twists in an ugly kind of smile. “Would you still be so sure?”

“You’re a Hero.”

“The fuck are you-“

“*You* wouldn’t hurt him.”

Tommy jerks, a near flinch with a rippling of his muscles at the abrupt change of tone as Ranboo leant forward, something burningly *sure* in his gaze, a confidence that makes Tommy want to look anywhere but at him.

“You came all the way into Pandora to get us out of here, working with Villains-“

“Shut up-“

“- because at the end of the day *you* are choosing *people*-”

“*SHUT UP!*” Tommy staggers to his feet with a snarl. “You don’t know *shit*-“

“You *care* about Dream and you *care* about Wilbur,” Ranboo pushes, unrelenting as Tommy’s tail swishes with the agitation running through his blood. “I know that much.” One too sharp canine sink into his lower lip, shoulders hunching, whatever bravery that had possessed him draining out with a step back. “Look, I’m not trying to antagonize you-“

“Then *shut* your fucking *mouth* before I *make* you.”

Silence stretches between them, Tommy's chest heaving, Ranboo slowly wilting.

"I'm sorry."

"No, you're *not*," Tommy growls.

"I am!" Ranboo disagrees, shaking his head. "I didn't- of course I don't know you better than you know yourself but--"

"I'm a *Hero*, and I'm going *back* to being a Hero, once all of this is done." He clenches and unclenches his pink hand. "I'll be back at Dream's side and everything will be how it was and- and-" Tommy falters, swallowing. "Wilbur- he'll, he'll forget about me and I'll- maybe I--"

His head hurts and Tommy grinds the heel of his palm into his eyes, blinking furiously.

Ranboo gives him an unfathomable look. "You don't really believe that, do you?"

I don't.

The emerald, the feather and golden ring feels heavy where they press against his skin, above his heart.

More importantly... I don't think I want to believe it.

His teeth sink into the inside of his cheek because- he doesn't know what to do with it.

"For what it's worth," Ranboo says slowly, hesitating for a moment before looking up. "I think you are a good Hero."

"Shut up," he bites out tiredly. "Just- just fucking *shut up*."

"Okay."

Tommy draws a harsh breath before letting it out. "We- we need to find Judge and the Warden."

"Okay."

He stalks forward, bending down stiffly to shove Wilbur's stuff into the backpack, neck burning at the eyes that rest on him.

"I think I know where Jester and Nemesis is."

"Okay."

Tommy stares down at the backpack, swallowing before shoving it aside, there's nothing in it he needs anyway, and instead he snatches up the escrima sticks and the gun, strapping them back securely.

“Stay close to me.” There’s still two capsules in his mask, Dream’s blood and his power, useless inside the walls of Pandora. “Or don’t,” he bites out as he snatches up the gloves and pulls them on.

“Okay.”

Tommy twitches.

“If I hear one more *okay* out of your mouth I’m cramming a sock down your throat until you *choke*,” Tommy informs him flatly, turning around to face the prison cell door.

“Ok- I mean, yeah, I’m- shutting up now actually...”

Tommy stands, once again dressed as Red Chaos, and his future has never felt more unsure.

Ranboo steps up beside him and Tommy flicks a single glance towards him before focusing ahead.

One step at a time, Tommy reminds himself firmly. *That’s all you can do.*

“So, how are we going to find Tubbo-“

An explosion rocks the floor and Ranboo startles, stepping closer, shoulder bumping against his own before he jerks back.

“Sorry-“

“Any more questions?” Tommy cuts him off dryly.

Ranboo pauses, holding up a finger, before slowly curling it down as Tommy glowers at him.

“None,” Ranboo let’s out a nervous laugh and a small cough. “So- rescue mission! Woaaa...” His voice tapers off and he makes a small little fist pump while shrinking on himself. “Let’s go-?”

Tommy stares at him.

“Really the picture of inspiration there.”

“Hey, man, I’m *trying*- “

“Try less, I think my soul is cringing.”

He turns and pushes out of the cell, hearing Ranboo scrambling to follow him and-

Tommy halts as he feels a hand latch onto the side of his shirt, slowly craning his head back to stare up at the other teenager who ducks his head but doesn’t let go, fingers bunching the fabric tight, almost desperately.

“You told me to stay close.” Ranboo’s gaze won’t meet his, the mask hiding his face, but this close it’s hard not to notice the small tremble of his shoulders, the way sweat has soaked the

front of his shirt almost entirely through, a clear struggle against exhaustion from the drain and heat of Pandora.

“... We’re going to have to move fast.”

Ranboo flinches, ducking his head.

“Maybe... it’s better if you leave me behind. Find Tubbo and-“

Even as he speaks, his grip doesn’t loosens, and Tommy stares at him, mouth twisting behind his mask.

He lets out a huff, claspings Ranboo’s wrist and forcing it off him before turning his back and lowering himself down.

Silence.

“I’m not offering *twice*, ” Tommy warns, heat crawling up his cheeks.

It takes a brief moment but he feels Ranboo’s lanky arms hesitantly circle his shoulders and a yelp in his ear as he hoists the tall fucker up on his back with a grunt.

A chin comes down on his shoulder and Tommy’s skin crawls even as he takes a determined step forward.

“Thank you,” Ranboo murmurs into his ear.

“Don’t mention it,” Tommy bites out. “*Seriously.* ”

Chapter End Notes

What do you know, using hair dye not meant for hybrids and then going for a swim has its consequences, none of them enjoyable for our boy.

Ranboo and Tommy's conversation turned out a bit longer than I expected but he's now back and dressed in Red Chaos gear and I honestly love that for him so we'll just have to take everything else in the coming chapters. I did some little changes to his suit because we had one wired up Karl anxiously working on them and mans just couldn't help himself- hope you enjoy that, lmao. I personally am quite fond of the new green sleeve. Iconic.

I had this done pretty much this Monday but it took me until now to find the energy to edit and wrap it up properly. Long week man but life goes on.

As always, I really can't thank you all enough for the lovely messages, art, everything else just- amazing. Love you guys.

Hope you're having a good one, wherever you are out there in the world<3

-

If you're interested there's a [Hush Now Discord](#) that tends to go *brrrr* with the theories in designated channels and also have a lot of fun chatter and chill people on top of scoops of chaos with my lovely mods<3

There's also a Hush Now Index created by me and Isa, and you can access it in the "Hush Now Index" channel on my server for those of you who are interested! Hella shout-out to Isa for the incredible work she put into it<3 It looks amazing.

You can find me on **tumblr** here: [corpse-art](#)

And I'm also on **twitter**:

main: [corpsey_art](#)

alt (where i just post prompts): [corpseyreads](#)

I post a one hour countdown on all my social medias for a new chapter update if you're interested in such a thing :)

-

DUDES. We have new Hush Now art!! They're all amazing. Go and give them all so much love<3

(And if I ever miss linking your art- pls let me know!! I try to make sure I keep track of everything but I am but human)

[Just A Kid by AnonymousLife](#) animation

[I am Red Chaos by chapstickcaps](#) art

[FANART MASTERPOST](#)

Chapter 55

Chapter Summary

NOT an april fools, it's april 2nd here, i waited to midnight and all-

Chapter Notes

i successfully remembered these this time, *hah*

Tommy - Red Chaos

Heroes:

Dream - Dream

404 - George

Valorant - Sapnap

Royal - Eret

Rose - Hannah

Schlatt - Schlatt (formerly Judge)

Villains:

Angel of Death - Phil

Blood God - Techno

Siren - Wilbur

Warden - Sam

Lethe - Ranboo

Judge - Tubbo

Jester - Quackity

Nemesis - Niki

Eris - Eret

Vigilantes:

Faux Pas - Fundy

Chronos - Karl

Kitten - TinaKitten

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

If Tommy's entirely honest with himself, maybe the two weeks in Warden's care had fucked him over more than he wants to admit to.

... Or maybe Ranboo's just, real fucking heavy despite his lanky stature.

He hoists him where he's slipping down, teeth gnashing together as his steps pelts against the floor, the sneakers much quieter than the slap of his bare feet had been.

He takes his wins where he can and despite the heat making his already parched throat ache there's something terribly exhilarating about being back in his own gear, a rush of adrenaline that keeps his pace steady onwards.

Being Red Chaos had always been easier than being Tommy.

Fuck, he'll take what he can, knowing where the path ahead is leading him.

Back to the Warden.

Back to *Sam*.

He dreads it and he hates that he does.

Resents the *weakness* of crumbling when everything demands him to be in his sane mind and body.

"You missed a turn."

"Fuck you," Tommy responds automatically, even as he twists, just as there's another explosion that rocks the very foundation of Pandora, very much from the turn he'd missed. "How the fuck did you pinpoint that?"

"The sound bounces," Ranboo says, his voice strained and grip weak where he's clutching onto his hoodie. "And I've got good hearing."

"You don't say," Tommy mutters under his breath, heart pounding inside his chest.

Dream's power has never been closer and he takes comfort in that with a certain kind of desperation.

A divide in the path ahead makes him slow in, just for a second-

"Left," Ranboo murmurs into his ear. "And then a hard right."

Tommy doesn't bother answering him, sneakers skidding against the ground before carrying them left.

-

It's only sharp reflexes that saves him.

In one caught breath he's lurching forward, twisting sharply to loosen Ranboo's grip on him and take the brunt of the fall with a curve of his shoulders to prevent his head from hitting the ground as his back slams down, sliding several meters with Ranboo drawn against his chest.

“Fucking hell,” he hisses, shoving Ranboo off him and grabbing for the gun on his thigh. “Watch where the hell you aiming when there’s fucking civilians around!”

“Red Chaos.” It’s not an Enforcer, but a Hero, that takes a step a step forward, shadows curling around their feet and palm raised towards him. “You are under arrest.”

And-

Tommy’s eyes widens as the shadow shoot out towards him like the legs of a freakishly long-legged spider.

He scrambles to get up but they’re *too fast* and one coils around his ankle, yanking his feet from under him and dragging him down the corridor with a clatter of the pulled gun behind him as he twists, palms dragging against the ground as he swears.

Tommy uncurls his tail from around his waist as he ends up at the Hero’s feet and-

“Two can play that game,” he snarls viciously as he lashes out with it, wrapping it tight and yanking both legs from beneath the Hero as he pushes up to lurch towards them only-

He gets caught mid-air, dangling for a moment like a *child*, eyes slowly drifting down to the Hero that has his palm up towards him, expression twisted into something harsh.

Black clothes, a bandana tied around their head, red wrapping fiendish up their sleeve in a pattern not unlike a flame, lower face covered by black fabric.

It’s not a Hero Tommy’s ever met, not someone he knows the name or rank of, and yet their gaze burns into his with something personal that makes his hackles rise.

“You don’t even recognise me, do you?” There’s sweat dripping down the other Hero’s brow. “Too *low ranked* for the great and mighty *Red Chaos*, weren’t I? But look at you now- *how the mighty have fallen*.” Vicious satisfaction seeps into their tone. “Valorant deserved better than you!”

Tommy gapes at him.

“The fuck Valorant got to do with me-“

“Don’t play dumb!” Tommy feels the shadows constrict around him, curling around his neck in a bruising grip that makes him choke. “Valorant is ten times the Hero you ever were!”

What-

The Hero steps right and forward, eyes narrowed he turns his head to try and peer at Tommy’s tail. “To think, that all this time you were a hybrid. Were you ashamed? Is that why you hid it, huh? I always knew you were a *coward*.”

"I'm not-"

"I became a Hero to follow in Valorant's footsteps," the other cuts him off. "But every time I reached out to him he was too *busy* with the likes of you and Dream."

"Because they're friends?" Tommy wrestles out in a wheeze. "And you're, what, some kind of fanboy-*hey!*" He gets yanked forward with a rough turn through the air, ending up dangling with his head down, feeling the blood rush to his skull as he kicks his feet. "It's okay, he's an admirable guy, you shouldn't get all flustered--"

"Shut up!" The Hero interrupts, cheeks heating red. "It's not- it's more than that--"

"Of course it is," Tommy laughs, shadows constricting harder yet. "And he *for sure* knows who you are, don't he--" His words get cut-off, along with his air, lips parting but nothing reaching his lungs even as he gasps like a fish and--

"I don't really prescribe by Dream and yours little self-imposed rules," the other shrugs, something gleaming in his eyes as he steps closer, lowering himself down in a crouch to put them face to face. "The whole *not killing thing*, you remember that? Yeah, not my thing, especially when it comes to traitors like *you*."

A grin behind the dark fabric.

"You are nothing, Red Chaos," the Hero tells him with an eerie sort of calm. "Perhaps, in another life, we could have been friends." He reaches up, pulling down his mask, to bare a face of someone that can't be much older than himself. "It's a real shame, really. To think that the once heralded Hero Red Chaos would meet his end here, in the prison of Pandora, surrounded by the scum of the earth." A single sharp canine in the twist of his smile. "But perhaps that's just where you belonged all this time, just like *Dream*."

Tommy stares into dark burgundy eyes, fury knotting tight in his chest, glowering darkly at him.

"My name is *Eryn*," the other tells him, leaning closer, a palm pressing flat against his chest. "You better remember it, *Villain*."

"Red!"

And- Tommy's gaze flicks for a single moment to Ranboo's hunched over form, half-slumped against the wall, eyes wide on him.

"Run you idio--" The air gets torn out of his chest as he abruptly slams hard into the wall, the bruises already there from the Blood God making themselves painfully reminded as he's dragged along it before being thrown, landing roughly and rolling before coming to a halt.

This is bullshit, something inside of him snarls, all hackles and a furious blood thirsty rise of indignation that wraps thorny around his heart as he pushes up, stumbling to his feet.

Shadows wrap around him, tearing him back down with a brutal harsh yank that rattles his teeth, muscles coiling to brace and avoid hitting his head and--

“Where is your bravery now, Red Chaos!” Eryn heckles as the shadows slams him into the wall, hitting it badly shoulder first with a harsh noise that escapes his mouth in a hiss through his teeth as he feels it tear out of its socket. “*This* is the famed Hero that stood at Dream’s side? Don’t make me *laugh!*”

“Screw you,” Tommy gasps and-

A lantern clatters down the corridor and Tommy winces as he hits the ground with all the elegance of a puppet cut from its strings.

Something grabs onto the back of his hoodie, yanking him up and back in a rough stumble, dragged behind the curve with a sharp pull that nearly takes his feet from beneath him with a startled *squawk* that he’ll deny to his death.

Burgundy eyes burn into his just before he disappears around the corner, shadows drawn back from the cast of light, and-

“We can’t fight him like this,” Ranboo whispers frantically, pulling him along backwards. “We’re not long-range fighters.”

Tommy snaps his teeth in annoyance. “Speak for yourself,” he bites back, twisting his good shoulder sharply to get out of the grip on him and instead shoving Ranboo roughly behind him, eyes still on the hallway as he backs the other. “I can be whatever the *fuck* I want. I just gotta get close enough.”

He looks over his shoulder to see Ranboo’s gaze flicking down to his tail that stills its swishing behind him.

“Is that-“

“It only happens what I bite hybrids,” Tommy cuts him off sharply, tail curling around his knee as he tears his attention away from the taller and ahead. “He doesn’t- I don’t think he is one.”

Ranboo’s chest is expanding roughly behind him in dry harsh breaths before they quiet suddenly with a sharp inhalation.

“So you just need to get close enough? To... get his blood.”

“*Clearly.*”

“So you need a distraction,” Ranboo nods to himself, once, in an idle sort of odd way.

“No I don’t-“

“Okay- *okay*, I can do that,” Ranboo says to himself and Tommy’s brain blankly registers the words for what they are in the same moment the taller lands a hand on his shoulder, using him as a spring board forward with a lurch.

Tommy catches himself with a single slide back, jolting himself forward in the next breath as something dark struggles to form with a spark of purple glitter at the tips of Ranboo's curled fingers.

"You fucker-" he hisses between his teeth, shoulders coiling tight in panic that wires through him. "How the hell did you get so fast-"

Eryn rounds the corner and Ranboo's hand darts out towards him only to have startled shadows wrap all around him, stilling his hand inches away from the still bare face.

"Surprise?" Ranboo cracks out just before he gets slammed back, knocking out the light on the wall to leave them drenched in darkness.

"You *motherfucker*-" Tommy slams into Eryn a second later, mask unlatching and sharp metal teeth opening wide as he twists his head, aiming for the soft flesh between his neck and shoulder.

He feels the jerk of them sinking into bone, the following *snap* of their clavicle as his own teeth tears through flesh, blood pooling in his mouth and power surging through his veins, an *awareness* settling like an itch in the back of his mind as he swallows it down.

Eryn hits the ground back first, Tommy's knees harshly hitting their ribs, concaving them with a brutal push and a jerk of his head from the force of it.

He pants, lips drawn back in an awkward grimace, blood staining his teeth, Eryn eerily still beneath him, dark blood trickling from the corner of his lip.

He stares down at the other, someone who couldn't be more than eighteen, a tremble running through him.

"Is- is he dead?" Ranboo's voice comes weakly from behind him, strained where he'd collapsed down.

Tommy raises his hand towards him, blindly giving him the middle-finger.

"... I can see that."

Tommy slowly unlatches his teeth, blood dripping warm from the sharp teeth.

"You were meant to," Tommy mutters back, licking blood from his lips with a grimace.

His fingers searches blindly down before digging harshly into a soft throat and-

No heart beats beneath his trembling fingers and he squeezes his eyes shut.

"He's alive," he lies hoarsely.

"Oh." Ranboo lets out a relieved sigh. "That's good."

Tommy pushes himself off the other Hero, shaking his head roughly, reaching his hand out and feeling the shadows strains curiously towards him, the feeling not unlike what he'd imagine a pile of eager puppies.

Something is fucked up about me, Tommy thinks distantly, a wry sort of odd dissonance as he wipes his hand absently against his pants.

"The power won't last me long inside Pandora." He stares blindly into the darkness that crowds around him, slithering cold up his skin twisting around his ankles, waiting for his bidding. "Next time, you don't act until I fucking tell you to."

"It worked, didn't it?" Ranboo expresses carefully and Tommy's kinda thankful he can't see the other's face in the darkness.

It's a frustration that blooms tight in its constrictions around his heart, heavy and resentful.

He misses Dream.

He keeps fucking up, keeps making mistakes-

Dream would never have allowed him to reach this point.

He digs the heel of his palm into his eye, looking down the corridor, trying to make sense of the feelings knotting and gnawing and twisting inside of him with the corpse of the Hero- of *Eryn* behind him.

I protected Ranboo.

He's a civilian.

He's a Villain.

Tommy blinks.

Those distinctions shouldn't matter.

He digs the heel of his palm in deeper, watching the fuzzy white dots on the inside of his eyelid.

I protected Techno for Wilbur.

I protected Ranboo for Techno.

He rolls his gaze heavenward, staring up at the ceiling without really seeing anything.

Is it really so bad to not want to care? he wonders and he doesn't have any answers.

Tommy drops his hand down with a breath and steps closer to the wall, bracing his shoulder against it and-

"Red-"

A harsh push and he feels his shoulder pop back into its socket with a hiss between his teeth.

He presses a palm against it, rolling it carefully, making sure it was properly in place before stumbling his way over to Ranboo.

He turns on his heel, bruised back hitting the wall roughly, letting himself slide down until he's collapsed beside him.

"Sure," Tommy grunts finally. "And you could just as easily have gotten killed."

And it would have been my fault.

"But I *didn't*," Ranboo says with the kind of upbeat false cheer that makes Tommy twitch.

"You do it again and I'm killing you myself," he informs the older. "And I'll make it *slow*."

A nervous laugh. "Got it."

"You hurt?" Tommy asks after a moment, forcing his shoulders to ease down.

Ranboo's expression draws faintly in the darkness as he turns his face towards him. "Are *you* okay?"

"Not what I asked."

A low sceptical hum. "Just bruises."

"Right." A beat. "Idiot."

"You sound like Tubbo." Ranboo sags where he sits. "He must be worried out of his mind."

Tommy's mouth dips behind his mask and he hesitates but- "Hey, Ranboo?"

"What?" the other asks, jerking a bit startled towards him.

Tommy draws his knees to his chest, dropping his chin on top of them. "... Do you think Wilbur will forgive me?"

Another explosion, further away, and Tommy knows they need to get going but-

"You really care for him, don't you?" Ranboo's voice is kind, empathetic in the sort of strange way that Tommy doesn't know what to do with. "He's- Wilbur's always been a bit complicated but he loves you, that much is clear to anyone who has eyes." A pause where Tommy almost forgets to breathe, the words carving its path in his soul. "And- you're, well, *you*."

"... What is that supposed to mean?"

"I just mean that well... Don't take this the wrong way but you and Wilbur, you both found each other at the lowest points in your life, didn't you? It's almost like- like you're two sides of the same coin." Ranboo's brows are furrowed as Tommy turns to stare at him. "The world

is a bit of a strange place, isn't it?" The other laughs, a small thing, and it doesn't feel mocking. "Maybe you and Wilbur were meant to meet when you did? Like, you were meant to find each and- and now you two just gotta find each other again. Without masks this time."

"... You're a bit of a weirdo, anyone ever tell you that?" Tommy grumbles, cheeks heating as he ducks his head.

Whatever Ranboo means to answer gets cut-off with a shout from the end of the corridor.

"Hey! You down there--"

Both their heads snap down to the side, to the two armed Enforcers.

Tommy's mouth twists in annoyance. "Really?" he mutters, pushing his right fist against his left palm with a crack of his knuckles as he slowly straightens out, groping for the feeling of the shadows that perk up, crowding along his legs like eager puppies, quivering and straining in excitement to be used as he rolls to his feet with a groan.

"You- stay down."

"I don't think I could move even if I wanted to," Ranboo admits faintly.

Eryn had raised his palm but there's another instinct entirely curving Tommy's shoulders forward, the leader of the pack as a dog-like shape slowly steps out of the shadows to fall at his flank, followed by more, tongues lolling as they pant without air, prowling around him with shadowy teeth and wisps of darkness licking at their hindlegs.

The pull of Pandora strains against him but Tommy pushes back at it, the ring pressing hot against his chest in response.

We hunt? The impression of words pushes against his mind, an eerie thing, not quite human.

"We hunt," Tommy agrees with a snarl and they *move*.

-

The dogs move at their side, dipping and lurching out of the shadows, almost falling over themselves, blending through each other with eager paws that make no sound against the floor.

The explosions are loud now and Tommy's shoulders are wired tense, Ranboo a limp weight on his back.

"Are you *sure* you don't see anything on it?" Tommy demands again, one arm looped around Ranboo's knee to keep him in place, the other staring down at the golden mask one of the shadowy dogs had stolen of an Enforcer with proud prancing steps.

"It's just a golden mask," the other repeats, chin on his shoulder, squinting at it.

"... And there's no strange glow."

“Do *you* see a strange glow?” Ranboo asks carefully.

“... I’m not- *fuck you*. ”

Tommy sends the dogs ahead, watching them pile over the prisoner and Enforcer at the end of the hallway with a distracted glance as he pelts past them.

The dogs disappear into the shadows whenever a lantern comes ahead, appearing at his side steps later, nipping at each other and snapping their fangs soundlessly as they run at his side like a chaotic doggy mess.

The explosions are loud now and it doesn’t make *sense* because the Warden should be affected by the draining power of Pandora as well and yet-

And *yet*.

The golden ring he’d gotten from Techno is hot against his skin and the Enforcer mask that stares back at him glows with the faint purple shine that had clung to the Warden’s armour.

In the olden ages, gold was the material that carried magic the strongest. It was not as sturdy as netherite, or even diamond, but its magical properties were unmatched.

Tommy nearly misses a step from the drawling dark rumble of the Blood God, blinking furiously as he gropes around for the god’s presence but finding only a lingering feeling at the edge of his senses instead of the overbearing pain that he’d come to associate with him.

So I’m... not... imagining it? Tommy ventures carefully, least he pisses the being off again.

It is a side effect I did not take into account, the Blood God rumbles before once again withdrawing with a slide of something that makes the hair on the back of his neck rise.

Tommy doesn’t have time to spare it any mind, pocketing the mask and bending his knees in the slide around the corner just as an explosion goes off in the corridor and-

“I know where Jester is!” The words are out of his mouth, heart pounding, and staring at the raised palm, shadowy dogs sliding to a stop beside him, around him, colliding into each other with skidding hindlegs frantically pulling to a stop before they all pool into the shadows like a slip and slide.

The scent of gunpowder is thick in the air, grey smoke curling around their legs inside the dark walls.

The Warden’s golden armour gleams with the purple, such a dull thing it could be a trick of the light, but clearly *wasn’t*.

His chest heaves in controlled breaths, air sucked in through his parted lips and out through his nose to regulate a forced calm.

“Lethel!” It’s Tubbo, scrambling forward, ignoring Warden entirely as he comes up at Tommy’s side, already reaching for Ranboo as Tommy slowly loosens his hold on the taller

teenager, letting him slide off.

His gaze doesn't veer from Warden's dark visor, tension keeping his shoulders tight, the dogs pacing in the shadows, itching to explode out of it.

"I see you have chosen to stop hiding." The Warden doesn't lower his palm. "You don't do well at following orders, Red Chaos."

"I got to the control room, didn't I?" Tommy bares his teeth behind his mask. "Can't help I got a bit fuzzy on the details after all those twists and turns."

"You said you knew were Jester is?" It's Tubbo's voice, something sharp in the way he tilts his head, half-supporting Ranboo who'd slumped down against him. "You two can bitch this out between the two of you later."

Tommy stares at the Warden.

"Well?" he challenges, heart pounding inside his chest.

Slowly Warden lowers his palm. "Where?"

-

One of the dogs yelp, scrambling back as Warden's palm presses against the obsidian, sparks kicking off and an explosion crumbling it, ducking through without concern, disappearing into the gunpowder smoke.

"Are you sure he's there?" Tubbo asks, kicking a rock out of the way.

Tommy's back on carrying Ranboo duty after watching Tubbo try, and fail, to haul the much taller teenager onto his back.

"I saw Nemesis," he answers after a long moment eventually, lowering his voice. "And in the cell beside her I saw feathers."

And blood.

"Wasn't really the best angle," he bites out as Tubbo's eyes meets his. "But it's the best bet I've got."

"It would make sense, wouldn't it?" Ranboo offers, hunkering down against him as Tommy side-steps carefully to squeeze through the hole. "That they, uh, kept them together."

"Who knows what goes through Schlatt's mind," Tubbo says, something dark brewing in his eyes. "He's issues when it comes to Jester."

"*Issues*," Tommy repeats, hurrying his steps to round the corner after Warden, making sure to keep him in sight but staying far back.

He averts his gaze as a lone Enforcers stumbles into Warden's path, the trident gleaming before it shoots forward.

The alarm is still blaring obnoxiously around them, but it almost feels like a backdrop, something distantly annoying.

It blocks out the wet noise of the trident tearing through flesh and bone.

"They used to work together," Tubbo says, startling Tommy as he swivels his gaze to the shorter. "Jester... before he became *Jester of Las Nevadas* he was well-known in the underground of the Pit and, well, you've been there. You saw the poster of Schlatt."

"I did."

"Well, it's because he was one of the first hybrid Heroes to claim a top spot, going as far as becoming the Number One Hero. But it came at a price." Tubbo's head lowers, the bone ram mask sliding down to cover his eyes. "'*What happens in the Pit, stays in the Pit*'. That's how it goes. And Schlatt was very much part of it. But- he's a clever bastard, as much as I hate to say it. He used Jester as the front figure and left him to get the backlash while he swaggered off to climb the ranks. Anything to keep his past squeaky-*fucking*-clean." A shake of his head. "Jester clawed his way out of it, left his old name behind, but everyone who was someone in the Pit knows the truth of it. Of *him*."

"Huh." Tommy blinks. "That's... shitty as fuck."

"There's bad things on both sides," Ranboo says quietly, eyes on Tubbo. "Heroes and Villains..."

"People will overlook a lot of things." Tubbo says, side-steps the corpse of the Enforcer, hand grasping the scruff of a shadowy dog with lolling tongue. "Jester has been trying to get anything to use on Schlatt for years now but he cleaned things out real proper, man."

Tommy stares at the back of the Warden ahead, brow furrowed.

"What about your bedroom in the tower?"

"What?" Tubbo laughs, a startled little thing that trails into a huff of air. "He took pity on an orphan kid who didn't know any better. People would be eating out of his palms if that ever came out and I'd just be back in his hands. People won't hear what they aren't interested in hearing and Schlatt has never been more popular as it is now." One of the shadowy dogs brushes up against his side, tail wagging lazily, and Tubbo reaches out absently to stroke its head, scratching behind its ears. "I thought that with Dream- maybe things would change. But of course Schlatt was just biding his time."

Tommy reaches up, pressing his palm flat over the feather, ring and emerald.

The gold is almost hot enough to burn against his skin.

"Once we have Jester we just gotta get out of Pandora and we can- we can start actually doing something," Tubbo says firmly and with an optimism Tommy doesn't particularly

echo. "And Nemesis- she's one of the few who can go up against Schlatt with her power." Tubbo raises his head. "And you- you can borrow her power as well, right?"

"For a few minutes."

Tubbo tilts his head. "You've had this for a bit, haven't you?" He gestures for the dogs.

"Some powers are easier than others," Tommy shrugs uncomfortably. "I never know and Nemesis' power didn't stick with me for more than like, five."

"And Dream's?"

"None of your business," Tommy tells him sharply.

"Because it's your main power," Tubbo hums. "Got it."

"I like the dogs," Ranboo hums from his shoulders, the tips of his fingers scratching against the head of one that stretches up only to stumble and disappear into the pool of shadows, appearing a moment later with prancing steps at his other side. "It wasn't what that other Hero used them as."

"Maybe he needed some creativity lessons," Tommy grumbles back.

"Oh yeah we ran into a few Heroes as well," Tubbo nods. "Warden took care of them. Mostly low rank. Like, *really* low rank."

"The alarm has been ringing for some time, I'm surprised there isn't more," Tommy huffs. "It's *weird*."

"Schlatt's a coward. I'll bet anything he's keeping any high rank near him for whatever he has planned." A glance. "He's not taking any chances. He wants you."

"Sucks to suck then because he's not getting me alive," Tommy mutters back in irritation, tracking Warden carefully. "We really should be hurrying shit up, this pace is killing me."

"The Warden is meticulous."

"You don't say," Tommy bites sharply back, his tone too defensive he recognises too late, and he clenches his jaw as Tubbo's eyes zeroes on him.

"You-"

"Fine. I'm *fine*. Fucking- peachy. Don't even start on it because I don't have the damn time to *not* be fine, alright?" he snaps in irritation.

Tubbo raises his palms up and Ranboo's arms tightens around him.

Tommy's skin crawls, anger flaring misplaced inside of him as he lowers his head, letting the hood slide lower and quickening his steps.

Tubbo easily lengthens his strides to fall in trot beside him.

“Did I tell you how I met Blood God?” Ranboo asks after a long stretch of awkward silence in where they make their way past four more dead Enforcers.

“... You did not.”

“Lethe-“

“It’s fine.” Ranboo waves a hand, grip finally losing, and Tommy draws a sharp breath that expands his ribs before letting it out, resisting the urge to shake himself like a dog. “He, mm, saved me. My memories are... spotty at best.” A small self-conscious laugh. “But I was part of this... *program*?”

“The Hero program,” Tubbo says, voice cautious but encouraging with a burning glance that Tommy pretends not to feel digging into him.

“That,” Ranboo nods in relief. “The intention was to make me *less* of a hybrid but well, as you can see, something went quite wrong. I don’t know what led me to being where I was when T- when Blood God found me but, uh, yeah. He found me, made sure I had someone looking after me, and I guess- I owe him a lot. Is what I’m trying to say?”

“The Heroes failed us, the Villains took us in,” Tubbo’s voice is sharp with dark irony.

“Nemesis isn’t going to let us out for a month after this,” Ranboo shudders.

“Not to mention Eris-“

Tommy nearly misses a step.

“Eris?” he blurts out, cutting Tubbo off. “The fuck Eris got to do with this?”

Silence, Tubbo and Ranboo both staring at him.

“*Why?*” Tubbo asks suspiciously.

Tommy opens his mouth.

Closes it.

“Eris is here,” he says finally, deciding that, fuck it, Eret can sort their shit out on their own. “Or well, they were, fuck if I know now. Blade sent us both in here to get the two of you out along with Nemesis and Jester but Warden separated us.”

“Eris is *here*?” Ranboo squawks.

“I just told you I don’t know,” Tommy huffs. “They could have bailed for all I know.”

“No way-“

“They’d never-“

Ranboo and Tubbo's voice stumbles into each other and Tommy rolls his eyes.

"Whatever," he interrupts. "That's all I know, anyway--"

Warden breaks the neck of an Enforcer with a twist of his palms, discarding them aside with a *thump*.

Tommy straightens, impatiently nudging Ranboo off him and to Tubbo who ducks to let Ranboo collapse down against him.

"Is that--"

"Nemesis' cell," the Warden says with a glance. "Jester's is ahead."

"Right."

"Where was she located?"

Tommy blinks. "Back corner." He squints. "Why are these still closed anyway?"

"Later additions," Warden answers shortly. "My system was not yet connected to them when I left."

Abruptly his arm shoots forward with a *clang* of metal against stone, blocking Ranboo and Tubbo from making their way towards the door.

Tommy tenses, flinch barely caught.

"What--"

"There is something in the air," Warden says slowly. "It's concentrated around the door."

"Some sort of safety feature?" Tommy wonders as he takes a step closer to the Villain, and then another, halting at his side, staring at the thin layer of blue dust that had gathered along the edges of the door. "Looks like 404's work," he reports blankly because-

Why the fuck would George have been here?

Warden takes an abrupt step back, hauling Ranboo and Tubbo along with him, and Tommy blinks, turning his head to stare at them at a safe distance away.

The golden armoured Villain keeps one arm out to keep both teenagers in place. "You will handle Nemesis. Lethe and Judge will both come with me to Jester."

"I can stay with him--" It's Ranboo, strangely enough, and Tommy glances at the tall teenager who looks entirely drained, one palm planted firmly on Tubbo's shoulder to keep himself in a shaky stand. "I mean- we should split up two and two and--"

"You can barely stand," Warden cuts him off. "You will stay by Judge's side."

"But--"

“I’ll get Nemesis,” Tommy cuts him off roughly. “Warden is right. My mask is specially designed to handle 404’s sleep powder.” He taps a finger against it. “You’ll go down like a sack of bricks.” He looks to the dark visor. “You’ll have to open it for me though, big guy.”

Instead of stepping forward, Warden reaches to his belt, pulling out a small pouch and throwing it over. “This will set off a small, controlled sound wave. It should be more than enough to get the door open.”

Tommy turns the pouch upside down, shaking out a small electronic piece, pretty innocent looking at first glance, with a single button on the side of it. A small roll of plastic contains a bit of clay to put it in place.

“Right,” he says. “Got it.”

“Take care of her for us.” Tubbo is lingering, the fabric of his shirt pulled up to cover his mouth. “She means a lot to us.”

“She’s family,” Ranboo says, eyes on the door, shoulders locked tight to keep himself where he stands.

Tommy’s mouth twists before he gives a firm nod. “Leave her to me.”

Tubbo’s brown eyes searches his before he gives one back.

And then he turns, wrapping an arm around Ranboo’s waist as Warden makes a turn, trident in hand.

Tommy watches them make their way down the corridor, quickly disappearing into the darkness of the shitty lightning.

The last remaining dog melts out of the shadows, pressing against his side, smoky grey orbs looking up at him, tail wagging carefully.

“I’m fine.” He strokes a hand down her head. “You look a bit like Fran, you know,” he tells her in a low murmur. “Will you stay with me for a little bit longer?”

Her tongue lolls out with a soundless bark and he gives her shadowy ear a scritch. “If I had a power of my own, I wouldn’t have minded something like you,” he tells her, grinning a bit tiredly behind his mask. “Let’s get this over with and then- and then we leave this place for good, yeah?”

Her tail picks up in speed, rump wiggling with the force of it, and his heart aches for the white dog that had showered his face in doggy kisses.

“Good girl,” he murmurs, swallowing the lump in his throat. “Wait over there, okay?”

She barks, diving into the shadows and appearing several steps away where she plants her butt down.

Tommy peels the clay out of the plastic and crouches down, using his thumbs to push it in place before securing the device on top of it.

He pushes the button, darting back, and it gives a low *whirr* and then a *click*.

A second later the air ripples with the force as it implodes.

His heart pounds inside his chest as he presses his palm flat against the door and pushes it open with a metallic creek, staring into the dark room and-

Nemesis' still sits where Tommy had seen her on the camera and the relief that bleeds through him is nearly enough to topple him where he stands.

The last shadowy dog appears at her side, nosing curiously at her cheek as Tommy takes careful step forward, peering around the depressing space, eyes dragging over the old blood on the ground as he carefully makes his way toward the Villain who sits curled up, chin against her chest.

He crouches down, gently nudging the doggy snout aside with his shoulder, feeling it settle on his shoulder instead. "Dork," he mutters with a small huff as he gently angles her head aside, pressing two fingers against her pulse and-

"Alive!" he calls back to no one in particular. "Definitely Gogy's bloody work," he breathes, brushing blue dust away from the bottom of her nose and rubbing it between his fingers. "At least an hour since he was here."

He stares at it for a moment before he wipes it off against his pants.

Limp locks of hair dangle from the hood over the scaled mask, eyes closed, breaths slow, deep asleep.

He closes his eyes, drawing a shuddering breath to center himself, knuckles scrubbing quickly over his stinging eyes because-

She's alive.

Asleep, but *alive*.

She's also hurt but he can only trust that it's nothing too badly, especially if it had been over an hour since George had been in the cell, for whatever reason.

"I'm going to haul you up on my back and you will not kill me when you wake up," Tommy tells her as he carefully shifts to get her arm up over his shoulder. "It's a bit of a journey before we're getting out of Pandora but there's a nice cold sea just below that should wash that powder off and then you'll be as good as new."

She's limp weight but he manages to hoist her up, a bit *too* easily compared to Ranboo's weight, nearly toppling him over before he rightens himself with a startled blink.

Warm breaths puffs against the back of his hoodie before he adjust her to get her chin up on his shoulder with a small rustle.

The dog prances around them both, tail going a mile a minute. "I know girl," he laughs, a quiet barked thing. "I'm glad too."

It tastes like hope, strange as it is.

"Come on, let's go find Jester," he murmurs to the dog whose tongue lolls out, stroking up against his side as she passes him by, taking point and leading the way.

The alarm is still blaring around them and his teeth sinks into the inside of his cheek as he glances around the otherwise quiet corridor, the hair raising on the back of his neck, a strange feeling squirming through him, weighing his steps as he comes to a halt beside the dog in front of the open door.

Hackles rise along her back like a ripple of shadowy darkness.

The Warden is crouched down in the middle of the cell, back towards him, and Tommy's eyes darts to Tubbo who's got his arm out in front of Ranboo, the ram skull hiding his expression entirely.

There's no Jester to be seen and Tommy licks his lips, taking a slow step forward, halting in the door opening.

"I've got Nemesis." His voice comes out distant, staring at Warden.

Ranboo's head snaps towards him and Tommy's heart misses a beat at the look in mismatched eyes, wide, pupils nothing more than pinpricks, ears folded back.

Warden straightens up from his crouch with a rustle of his armour, turning slowly, a bloody feather caught between the tips of his fingers.

Many more litters the ground, amidst old dried blood and chains left discarded.

And Warden stands in the midst of it in his golden armour.

Nausea climbs its way up his throat, the walls flicking between obsidian and the dark ones that had made up his two weeks of being a prisoner in his care, begging, pleading-

It's an ice-cold fear that sinks into his bones, something primal that locks his muscles, and closes around his throat like the bruising hold of a palm.

"Red-" Ranboo or Tubbo, Tommy can't make out who, his instincts screaming at him, a mismatched mess of prey and predator that makes his steps wobble.

Tommy stares into the dark visor, barely hearing the words through the buzz in his head, through the fear that sludges through him, his breathing quickening, short gasped static puffs that barely serve to fill his lungs, a light headed horror of *failure*.

Because Jester isn't there.

Jester isn't there.

"I've got Nemesis," he repeats, numbly, with a certain kind of desperation that rasps his throat. "Nemesis- she's- she's fine and-"

Warden steps towards him, a towering figure of gold, trident in hand and-

"You lied to me." There's something cold and distant in those words. "Is that all you're capable of, *Red Chaos*?"

The buttery yellow feather falls to the ground, spiralling clumsily through the air with the weight of the dried blood staining it, and-

A boot collides with his chest, faster than his panicked mind could comprehend, teeth clacking together as he twists desperately on his heel to take the brunt of the force against his shoulder with a snap of his head against the wall that sends black spots over his vision, wobbling and-

"Nemesis!" It's Ranboo's voice, filled with panic as Tommy's fingers grasps clumsily onto her legs.

Keep her safe, keep her safe-

It's instincts ground from years of being a Hero, something that makes *sense* amidst the blur of noise and sound and alien instincts clawing with hissing fur and desperate wings that want to *get away*.

"Warden!" Tubbo's voice snaps through the air, tense, shoulders hitched to his ears. "Jester was here! He didn't lie-"

"He's a Hero, *Judge*. All they do is lie, manipulating the truth for their own gain, playing at being the picture of *morals*."

Warden's hand shoots out and Tommy doesn't have time to step away, feeling it wrap around his throat and lifting him bodily into the air, his fingers clawing into the metal covered glove, pupils blown into small pinpricks amidst the blue as Nemesis drops to the ground.

"I'm not the bad guy. And the good guys.. have to work harder to be good guys." The visor draws back, revealing gold in a sclera of black. "Isn't that right, *Red Chaos*?"

It's Sam.

It's *Sam* and Tommy's mind is screaming as he's abruptly released, barely catching himself, words entirely beyond him as the trident twist through the air, staring into those eyes that had been so warm, crinkling at the corners with the greeting as he stepped into the small café and-

The shadowy Fran-like dog gets batted aside with a soundless yelp as she skidded across the ground, colliding against the wall, disappearing and-

“Stop it- Sam this isn’t you!” Tubbo lunges forward but Sam sweeps his feet out from under him with the end of the trident without looking, palm levelling down against him, sparkling and fizzling in warning. “You’re- I know you’re still in there, Sam,” Tubbo forces out desperately, palms raised flat. “This isn’t you and you know it! This is the Warden speaking-“

“Whatever I say in this prison goes,” Sam cuts him off, something dangerous in the twitch of his fingers. “I’m the one who makes the calls inside the walls of my own creation. Not you. And certainly not any *Heroes!*”

The trident draws back through the air, a familiar thing, and for a moment Tommy is fourteen again, the world slowing into a strange crawl around him as he twists to throw himself over Nemesis, shielding her as best as he can and-

The wet noise of metal tearing through flesh is loud in the air, his breaths short and panicked, but-

There’s no pain.

There’s no pain and-

Tommy’s ears are ringing as he slowly turns his head, frozen as he stares into green and red mismatched eyes that looks back at him with something surprised before they twist into something incomprehensible, slowly looking down and-

Three golden points sticks out, *redredred* bleeding out to stain the white fabric like a macabre picture of horror.

“Boo?” Tubbo’s voice is a frail tremble.

Ranboo chokes, dark blood spilling from beneath the edge of his mask, seeping down his throat in rivulets as Tommy’s heart pounds heavy and wet inside his chest.

Ranboo’s hand reaches out to touch against Tommy’s cheek, and-

There’s something naked and scared in those eyes, words turning into nothing more than a gurgle, choking and drowning in his own blood.

The trident gets yanked back, tearing out of the limp body that folds upon itself, like a puppet cut off its strings, caught by Tubbo whose knees hit the floor from the weight, Ranboo’s head pillowed on his lap as he tears off the ram skull to reveal nothing more than a boy.

“Boo? *Ranboo*- no- nononono stay with me-“ Hands press against the drenched button-up, blood dripping out to puddle on the floor beneath them both as Tubbo chokes on a sob, trembling desperate hands struggling to get the mask off Ranboo’s face, thrown to clatter to the ground, hands framing black and white cheeks. “You idiot- you why would you do that!? You swore- you promised- *together to the end*-“

The world snaps back like a rubber band breaking in two and Tommy jerks his head up, meeting Sam’s golden eyes.

Blood drips from the prongs of the golden trident.

“What have you done?” Tommy chokes out, a tremble running through him. “You *killed him*- “

“This is not my fault, Red Chaos.” *Goldgoldgold* burns into his, merciless and unforgiving as the Villain levels the trident towards him. “*You* did this.”

Chapter End Notes

is this chapter nearly the size of two? maybe. it's also the beginning of the end of this arc that wraps up in the next chapter or the one after, depending on how i work this out so uwu

... my condolences to all of you who were excited about the alliumduo bonding, rip, may your feelings rest in peace

i hope you're having a good one, wherever you are out there in the world<3

-

If you're interested there's a [Hush Now Discord](#) that tends to go *brrrr* with the theories in designated channels and also have a lot of fun chatter and chill people on top of scoops of chaos with my lovely mods<3

There's also a Hush Now Index created by me and Isa, and you can access it in the "Hush Now Index" channel on my server for those of you who are interested! Hella shout-out to Isa for the incredible work she put into it<3 It looks amazing.

You can find me on **tumblr** here: [corpse-art](#)

And I'm also on **twitter**:

main: [corpsey_art](#)

alt (where i just post prompts): [corpseyreads](#)

I post a one hour countdown on all my social medias for a new chapter update if you're interested in such a thing :)

-

DUDES. We have new Hush Now art!! They're all amazing. Go and give them all so much love<3

(And if I ever miss linking your art- pls let me know!! I try to make sure I keep track of everything but I am but human)

Jester of Las Nevadas by GraphX77
FANART MASTERPOST

Chapter 56

Chapter Notes

did i add these 2 min before posting.

...

maybe, maybe not. they're here, and that's what's important. yes. yippers. *yeehaw*

Tommy - Red Chaos

Heroes:

Dream - Dream

404 - George

Valorant - Sapnap

Royal - Eret

Rose - Hannah

Schlatt - Schlatt (formerly Judge)

Villains:

Angel of Death - Phil

Blood God - Techno

Siren - Wilbur

Warden - Sam

Lethe - Ranboo

Judge - Tubbo

Jester - Quackity

Nemesis - Niki

Eris - Eret

Vigilantes:

Faux Pas - Fundy

Chronos - Karl

Kitten - TinaKitten

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Ranboo is dead.

It's a realization that feels distant, feels untrue, even as Tommy stares into the golden eyes that condemn him for it.

Tommy's ears are ringing.

Or maybe it's alarm.

He feels strangely cold and hot at the same time, a shiver crawling down his spine and sweat beading at his brow as he sucks a trembling breath and-

A horrible laugh rings through the room, bouncing like a wrathful echo of grief as Tubbo stumbles to his feet.

"*He* killed him!?" Tubbo's mouth is a frightfully twisted grin, lacking of any joy, tear tracks on his cheeks, hands covered in blood clenching into tight fists at his side, a strange sort of sway to his motion before he abruptly stills. "Explain to me, exactly how, this is his fault, *Warden*."

"I don't have time to deal with you. You weren't meant to be here in the first place." Golden eyes burn into Tommy's. "He needs to die."

"Just like Ranboo needed to die!?" Tubbo demands, chest heaving and fists trembling. "You-"

"He got in the way." Warden's trident doesn't lower from where it's pointing towards Tommy. "This is what he does." The Warden's voice has a strange sort of shake to it, a barely there held control of the cool detached tone. "If it wasn't for Red Chaos-"

"*Red Chaos* was protecting Nemesis! ONE OF OURS!" Tubbo lashes out, hand sealing down around the trident and yanking it towards himself as he steps boldly between the two of them, planting his feet and squaring his shoulders. "Are you going to kill me too, huh, Sam?" A warped kind of smile stretches his lips. "Are you going to make sure *none of us* leave Pandora alive?"

"*What are you doing?*" Tommy hisses in a low voice, heart feeling ready to crawl up his throat, so tense his shoulders ache.

Flowers bloom from the cracks of Tubbo's clenched fist in response, an explosion of forget-me-nots that twists up and down the trident, green stems and petals wrapping in the blood still dripping from the prongs of it and-

It all comes back to the gold.

Bright and shining, warding against the draining effects of Pandora.

The Warden of Pandora.

Tommy blinks at Sam and-

Something unfathomable shines in the depth of Sam's eyes as he stares down at the flowers, watching the way they crawl towards his own clenched fist only to halt mere centimetres away with a quiver.

"Why are you protecting him?" And- there's something almost *lost* in his voice, a strange kind of thing in the metallic echo of his voice changer. "He and Dream- they are the ones

responsible for everything that led to this.” Sam’s eyes leaves the flowers but he’s not looking at Tommy now, his attention on Tubbo. “Heroes are corrupt. You and I both know it. We thought they might have been different but, in the end, they turned out to be exactly the same as all those before them.”

Sam’s eyes finds his and Tommy’s jaw aches, fear crawling like ants beneath his skin, burying into his muscles and eating their way into his heart.

“The only option is to kill him... to stop him by force but... No one else gets it. No one else understands, we- even you and Jester, they just don’t...” An odd look, ice crawling down Tommy’s skin. “Oh well.” The trident gets yanked back, torn roughly out of Tubbo’s grip and lurching him forward before Tommy’s hand snaps out, yanking him back- “It doesn’t matter. Red Chaos is here... I’ll just have to deal with him myself.” A slow blink of his eyes. “Ranboo’s death was... unfortunate... but it’s just further proof that Red Chaos needs to die...”

The visor slips back in place, hiding his face.

Tommy’s hand wraps around the handle of the escrima sticks, twisting and sweeping Tubbo’s feet from beneath him, catching an end prongs with a spark of electricity as he pushed them into activation but-

The Warden doesn’t as much as twitch. “Gold is a conductive, that is true.” The Warden takes a step forward, Tommy’s sneakers sliding over the ground with a grunt, muscles straining as the Villain steps over Ranboo’s dead body. “But if you think I did not take precautions then you’re more of a fool than I thought-“

“You killed Ranboo you bastard!” The trident yanks sharply aside as Tubbo stabs a knife into Warden’s thigh, kicked roughly aside in the same motion as the Warden twists, sending him skidding across the ground to hit Nemesis.

Tommy springs forward, arm sweeping wide to get around the Warden’s throat, grasping the escrima stick and slamming it backwards into the soft flesh of the Warden’s throat where no armour was protecting him, levelling his weight back and dragging the Villain against his chest, his instincts blaring in a cacophony of protest and deep surging retribution.

The Warden slams him back into the closest wall, one hand grasping the escrima and nearly yanking Tommy’s arms out of his sockets before he wraps his legs around Sam’s waist, feeling the metal dig roughly into his chest as he braces himself, snarling as he fights to hold on and-

He gets slammed into the wall again, three times, four times, his elbows bracing to keep the metal from hitting his face, muscles straining as he pulls harder, teeth gritted.

Abruptly the escrima is released, trident cluttering to the ground, and in the next moment Tommy feels hands dig into his shoulders, Sam’s back bending to drag him bodily over him in a harsh roll to tear him off, his back hitting the floor.

Tubbo's hand wraps tight around his wrist, dragging him back across the floor, Tommy clumsily rolling to get his knees under him, pushing up.

"Nemesis!" Tubbo chokes out in his ear. "Ranboo- he sacrificed himself for her *please*-"

Tommy grasps deep for the last remain of power, hand darting into his pocket, wrapping tight around the Enforcer mask still there and-

The shadow dog explodes out of the wall beside the Warden, snarling furiously, teeth bared, sinking into the forearm of the Villain and yanking him down, away from the trident he'd been reaching for.

The strain of it nearly sends Tommy's feet out from beneath him, sucking a harsh breath as his vision whitened furiously in a sparkle of dots.

He bites down on the inside of his cheek, tearing through skin that had barely stopped its bleeding as he sunk down on one knee and Tubbo is right beside him, already moving to push Nemesis up on his back, Tommy hauling her up with a grunt as Tubbo ducks beneath his arm to force him up on his feet.

"Ranboo-"

"*Leave him,*" Tommy bites out hoarsely. "There's nothing that can be done with a dead body."

Tubbo recoils, yanking Tommy with him, and he only just barely avoid slamming his face into the door frame as the shorter pushes him back roughly.

"He saved you," Tubbo grits out, a ravaged sound of barely kept together grief. "Have some damn *respect*."

"I'm- fuck, sorry okay," Tommy hisses out as they move down the hallway, away from Warden, too fucking slow and *knows it* but. Fuck.

He comes to an abrupt halt, chest heaving, the alarm blaring and-

"I fucking hate this *noise*," he snarls. "I can't fucking- *think*."

Nemesis weight is on his back, Tubbo barely keeping it together beside him, and Ranboo lies dead in the cell.

Jester is nowhere to be seen.

Tubbo shoves at him. "We need to go-"

"Warden will catch up with us," Tommy interrupts him. "There's no- *fuck*." He rounds on the other. "You- *you* have to take Nemesis."

Tubbo stares at him, pale, eyes wide behind a fringe of brown hair.

“What-“

“If you want Ranboo to not- to not have died for nothing-” Tommy sucks in a rough breath, swallowing thickly. “*You* need to get Nemesis out of here and let *me* handle Warden.”

Tubbo’s brows dips, eyes darting to Nemesis and then back to him. “You were having a panic attack-“

“I can handle it,” Tommy cuts him off. “I *have to*. This is- he’s not going to stop until he’s done with me or- or I’m done with him.” He glances back to the cell. “This- it’s *personal*.” His tongue drags over his tusks. “He made it personal,” he says in a quieter voice, heart pounding inside his chest.

Tubbo’s gaze is unfathomable when Tommy looks back, a strange searching look.

“You’re Tommy, aren’t you?”

Tommy jerks, mouth opening to deny it but-

“It- whatever. It doesn’t matter now. I can’t- Ranboo-“ Tubbo abruptly grabs hold of his shirt, yanking him down, and Tommy finds himself staring *too close* into his brown eyes, frozen. “Don’t you let him have died for nothing, you hear me?” Tubbo’s fists twists the fabric harshly. “If you’re *Tommy*- that only means that you have more invested in this than Red Chaos ever did.” A harsh drawn breath. “I want you to know this, Red Chaos. *You saved me*.” The words are low, a confession that sends a shiver down his spine. “If, by chance, you’re Tommy, no matter how fucked up that is, I’m taking that secret to the grave, do you understand? I owe you that, no matter what happens here tonight.”

“I’m-“

“Do. You. Understand?” Tubbo repeats, enunciating each word clearly.

“... I do,” Tommy responds slowly only-

He twitches, tensing as Tubbo yanks him closer, their foreheads bumping together.

“I want you to listen to me and listen closely, Red, okay? You don’t know if you can trust me or not, right? But it doesn’t matter, it’s as fifty-fifty as saying ‘oh, I’ve got a box of nothing in it, and it either has a bomb in it, or it has an apple, but it could have neither.’ Trust means *nothing* when we don’t know each other. And- right and wrong depends on which side you are, right and wrong isn’t really a fair way to describe things-“

“What’s your point?” Tommy wrestles out, the hair on his neck prickling uncomfortably.

“I’m not an advocate of violence,” Tubbo tells him, eyes darting, searching his. “I think everyone should just get along. I don’t- I don’t want to be an agent of *chaos*, if you will, or anyone who wants to start a violent activity- that’s what I swore to Ranboo. But Ranboo isn’t here anymore.”

A tear trails down Tubbo's cheek, his face twisted and Tommy swallows, the guilt weighing heavy in his chest.

"What do you want me to do?" he asks but he already knows the answer.

"Swear to me you'll make him pay." Words harsh and warped by both grief and rage, brown eyes burning into his. "Swear to me, *Red Chaos*."

"I swear." Tommy tells him heavily, resolution setting deep in his soul, the mark around his wrist burning hot in approval that slides down his spine as turns, sliding Nemesis onto Tubbo's back. "I'm ending this between me and Warden tonight."

"Good." Tubbo carefully hoists Nemesis up and it's a strange thing, the way he looks to Tommy, waiting for the next step. "I need a way out."

Tommy stuffs his hand into his pocket, pulling out the Enforcer mask and throwing it over. "Gold- it'll keep Pandora from draining you power. You felt it, when you grasped Warden's trident, right? And then- you can get down using your vines."

Tubbo stares down at the mask before slowly sliding it onto his face, sealing it with a *click*. "I can but there's obsidian everywhere."

"And Warden has already proven himself quite useful in breaking it."

Tubbo's gaze flashes with understanding.

"Got it. I'm getting us out of the way." Tubbo turns but pauses, back still turned. "If worst comes to worst- this is goodbye."

"Goodbye?" Tommy echoes haltingly before he can catch himself.

"Yeah like- everything hurts less. If you say goodbye at the start." Tubbo peers over his shoulder and there's a very small quirk of his lips. "Let's hope we live to say 'hello' again, alright, big man?"

"Oh." Tommy hesitates. "Goodbye, Tubbo."

"Goodbye, Tommy." A laugh. "If that's your name. You better not die, Red Chaos! There's more than one person that still needs you."

Tommy fumbles to undo the knot on the back of his neck, sliding the ring off before securing it back.

He rolls it in his palm briefly, admiring it with a small huff before yanking the glove on his right hand off, sliding it in place on his index finger, watching the way it settles against the pink with a brief dilating of his pupils as he flexes and unflexes his fingers carefully.

Unlike the way it had felt against his chest it's almost cool to the touch, right in a way that it has no right being, instincts crooning with a rumble of violence that ripples down his back, tail flicking from side to side behind him.

He unlocks the compartment in his mask, letting one capsule slide down to settle on his tongue.

One, out of his last two ones.

He rolls it to catch it between his sharp canines, bracing himself.

The shadow Fran-like dog slides over the floor, out of the cell, catching herself with a scramble of paws to bare her teeth, hackles rising in a ripple of shadows as the Warden steps out after her, trident twirling.

“I’m putting an end to this tonight,” Tommy swears to himself, biting down on it and feeling Dream’s powers rush through him in a familiar heady thing, red light zipping up his limbs, swirling around him, disturbing the dust and debris on the ground, clothes rustling as it circles around him.

He embraces it, forcing it down to his legs, muscles clenching as he slides one foot back.

Ahead the shadow dog pauses, eyes turning towards him, head lowering into something like a bow before she melted away.

Warden halts, turning sharply towards him.

And Tommy *moves*.

It’s an explosive thing, a zip of red as he blurs into motion, ducking the swing of the trident that moves *too slow*, the Villain barely in the motion of beginning to turn as Tommy twists around him, bracing and slamming his leg hard into Sam’s back.

“I’m sick-“

The Warden goes skidding down the hallway, armour rustling noisily as he rolls.

“-and fucking tired of you blaming me for everything!”

The armour, once an advantage but now a disadvantage, heavy and clunky with Tommy already in hot pursuit, red swirling around him as his palms hit the ground, four footed as he pushes off the floor and hits the wall, avoiding the explosion sent where he’d been.

He pushes off it, landing with a skidding of his sneakers behind the Warden, palm still outstretched, smoke curling through the air around them both.

“How about you get a taste of your own medicine!” he snarls, violence coursing through him as his palms grasp onto Warden’s shoulders, energy already rushing up his arms, and he hauls the Villain down the hallway, closer to where Tubbo had disappeared around the corner.

The trident is still clutched harshly in Warden’s hand, drawn to his chest and used to push to his feet, stumbling *back*.

The satisfaction wraps heady and rotten around his heart, a vindication that *burns*.

Tommy bares his teeth behind his mask, stalking closer, a swaying dangerous thing, twitching to explode into motion. “How does it feel to be the one thrown around?” Tommy growls, blue eyes spilling with the red of blood as the brand around his wrist pulses with hunger, tail lazily swishing from one side to the other, opposite of the sway of his body. “How does it *feel* to the one at disadvantage, *Warden?*”

He pushes off, an explosion rocketing the hallways, heat licking up his cheek as he skitters with a slide of his back along the ceiling, rolling to push abruptly down when he found himself above the Villain, his fist drawing back, redirecting the energy down his arm with a pulsing of his muscles before he slammed it forward.

The visor shatters, tearing his knuckles before they bury into Sam’s cheek, snapping his head aside and Tommy snarls as he bears down on him only-

Golden eyes burns into his and Tommy’s feet hits the hip-plates of the armour, Warden’s grip sealed tight around his wrist as the trident clutters to the ground.

A palm presses against his midriff. “*You’re still running,*” Warden rumbles, Sam’s voice bleeding into the metallic voice with a sharp noise of static from the broken voice changer, and Tommy’s breath hitches before he twists and-

The explosion rings loud, rattling his teeth, but his eyes doesn’t veer from Sam’s golden ones as his mouth curves into a razor sharp smile beneath his mask, leaning closer.

“Say that again,” Tommy breathes. “*I dare you.*”

His fingers digs deep into the Warden’s wrist, red zipping and dancing up his limbs, curling tight around his forearm as bones creak beneath his grip, the palm directed away from him.

“Well?” Tommy demands, glowering down. “Why the sudden silence? You seemed to have *plenty* of shit to say to me before this!”

The Warden remains quiet, fingers twitching as Tommy’s grip tightens further, and-

There’s a *snap*, a miniscule twitch of Sam’s stoic expression as the bones in his wrist breaks, and Tommy recoils at the noise, the red faltering-

Sam’s forehead slams into his and Tommy loses his grip in surprise and in the next moment he gets backhanded by a metal covered forearm that sends him skidding across the ground, palms flattening down to lurch to his feet, red zipping back up his limbs, tracked by golden eyes as the Warden slowly bends down to grab the trident with his good hand.

He twists it, twirling it bodily with an easy motion of his arm and shoulders, before sliding into a ready stance with the handle supported in the crook of his elbow.

Tommy clenches his fists tight.

“I see you figured out the secret of Pandora.” Warden’s voice layers with Sam’s and it’s fucking with him in the worst possible way, his heart pounding wet and heavy inside his chest as Warden’s head tilts meaningfully towards the ring on his finger. “*Clever.*”

“Don’t sound so surprised,” Tommy snarls back. “You’re covered in the shit and you’ve been using your power left and right.”

“Then you know that that small piece of gold isn’t going to let you keep that power for long.”

Tommy knows he’s out of his element inside tight walls that prevents him from moving freely but his teeth gnashes together and he pushes into motion because *damn it to hell if he’s letting that stop him*.

He twists through the air, his leg slamming into the trident, Sam’s feet skidding briefly before moving and Tommy’s hand wraps around one of the prongs of the trident, dragging it down with him with a furious snarl of frustration and fear alike as he throws it harshly aside, lurching Sam’s body with it, leaving him open and-

Tommy’s fist slams into the already broken wrist that jerks up to block it, feeling the way it *crunches*, the noise ringing in his head with a tidal wave of fear and he flinches before catching himself, stumbling several steps back, shoulders curling as he hunched on himself, palm pressing flat over his heart and-

You’re not there, Tommy reminds himself sharply, his breaths whistles harshly inside his chest, even with Dream’s power curling red around him, the energy thickening around his legs.

You got out, Techno- he got you out-

“I thought you were done running,” Warden takes a step towards him, broken arm almost an afterthought as it drops to hang at his side.

“Fuck you,” Tommy growls back, a shiver crawling through him, fingers twitching and eyes skating over *goldgoldgold*- “I am-“

“You don’t sound so sure, *Hero*.” And- for the first time something breaks through the façade of the Warden, Sam’s too human voice bleeding thickly through it. “Lying again?”

“I’m not fucking-“

“You said Jester was here!”

“And he *was*-!” Tommy’s voice breaks, the red zipping up his body, responding to the volatile rise of his emotions. “You can’t fucking tell me he wasn’t when *his* blood was all over his cell! When those were *his* goddamn feathers-“

The Warden is the first to move this time and Tommy twists, knocking the trident aside, teeth drawing back in a sharp cat-like hiss of warning, the skin on his back rippling with his hackles.

The Villain stills, smoke curling out from the broken mask.

“I. Didn’t. Fucking. *Lie*.” Tommy bites out each word painfully slowly, struggling against the instincts crowding too tight inside of him.

The wall leading towards the prison isn't far behind the Warden now and Tommy's fingers flexes carefully as he sinks his upper body forward.

Ideally, he would give himself more space, move back, recalculate-

But he can't risk Warden turning the situation around on him, to hunt *him*.

Tommy explodes into motion, red zipping violently around him, and he pushes the rush of energy into his arm like a pulsing wave of violence as the trident shoots through the air, and Tommy feels the end one tear into the soft skin of his cheek, just above his mask, as he jerks his head aside, dropping low as he slams his fist forward-

The air whistles, the energy exploding out, and Warden shoots back, airborne before slamming into the end of the hallway wall with a rattle of his armour, and Tommy's fist trembles, chest heaving and mouth twisting into a jagged grin of satisfaction that juts his tusks.

"*Got'cha*," he snarls, twisting the energy down to his legs and rocketing forward, past the dropped trident as Warden goes for the only optional defence, sparks smattering on his palm and-

Tommy's hand wraps around the Villain's wrist, the scent of gunpowder in his nose as he slams Warden's palm flat against the wall behind him.

"*Boom*," Tommy snarls hoarsely.

The explosion is *loud*, ringing in his ear, and the wall is crumbling, smoke thick around them both and-

Tommy's feet jerks beneath him, his eyes stinging and unable to see *shit* but feeling the way he gets shoved, hand twisting in his grip to grab onto his wrist, and-

Then suddenly nothing is beneath him and his other hand shoots out, clawing into the Warden's wrist, nails dragging against the gold, the cold winter air curling around him where he dangles.

The Warden stands, arm outstretched and Tommy hanging from the end of it, blood and dust clinging to him, armour missing on the side of his chest where the explosion had torn through it, the visible skin charred and dark and weeping blood.

"You're a pest," the Warden, Sam, tells him, something unfathomable in his voice.

"Yeah, well-" Tommy coughs, the adrenaline still burning through him making him almost feel delirious, the ground far *far* below him, waves licking up the shores of Pandora's island. "Not particularly housing any warm feelings for you either at the moment, big guy."

"You should have stayed at home," Sam's cold voice is a thing that blurs with the gentleness and warmth in his memories and Tommy feels his eyes sting.

"I could say the same to you, *Sam*," Tommy laughs, chest burning.

“Don’t call me that,” the Warden warns him, grip tightening, squeezing over the brand around his wrist.

“Fuck you,” Tommy musters back but it feels weak, tired, the red light zipping up his limbs, heaving up to get his fingers into the chink of the armour and digging down with a gritting of his teeth.

“You never stop.”

There’s blood on Sam’s face where the broken visor had torn into his skin, red amidst the patches of green, beading above his brow to trail down with a curve beneath his eye where it continues its path down his chin.

Tommy blinks at him and-

His mouth curves behind his mask, a bitter self-depreciating thing as he lets out a barked laugh, the very tips of his fingers folding beneath the metal in his grip.

“I’ll be honest with you,” he tells the other, red zipping up his midriff, rustling the fabric of his hoodie. “I don’t think I know *how*.”

He yanks himself down abruptly, catching the Warden off-guard with the sudden pull of motion and dragging him along with him as he turns sharply, using the momentum to swing like a wrecking ball towards the prison wall, knees bending to brace, and shooting off it to slam back into Sam and send them both rocketing out into the open air, away from the shore beneath them.

Away from Pandora.

Warden’s arm wraps around his midriff, sealing tight, and Tommy struggles, clawing at the fingers digging into his belly, struggling frantically and pushing with hands and feet to try and free himself.

“Let me go you bastard!” he shouts furiously.

The air whistles past them, Sam falling hard, dragged down by the weight of his armour, but Tommy is falling just as fast, caught in his grasp, the dark water approaching rapidly.

“If I’m going down,” Sam’s voice in his ear, his fingers bruising his flesh as he’s wrapped tight in the man’s grasp. “I’m taking you down with me, *Red Chaos!*”

They hit the water, Sam’s back taking the brunt, bubbles swirling white around them both as Tommy slams his elbows desperately back, prying at the fingers, bubbles leaving his mouth in a furious stream as they sink *downdown* into the dark depth.

He feels his beanie swirl into the depths, hair floating free, the cold a horrible thing that sinks its way into his limbs, leaving them feeling heavy and clumsy.

He slams his head and he feels it collide with something, Warden’s grip loosening for a moment before sinking into the collar of his hoodie, spinning Tommy along with him and

dragging him down as Tommy kicks blindly, the red light of his power streaking violently around them both, the only light in the darkness that swallows them up.

The air trapped in his chest burns, his ears aching, the surface getting further and further away and eyes stinging from the salt of the water as he claws into the hand keeping him trapped.

Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck-

Air bubbles from his mask and he jerks, feeling Warden's fingers dig into it, the broken arm outstretched stubbornly, the fingers curling weak, and-

Tommy stops fighting.

Stops struggling.

His mask unlatches from his face and Tommy, not Red Chaos, stares down into the golden eyes of the man who had taken him in into the small red brick café with its silly dog sign and even sillier white fluffy dog that greeted him with a tip-tap of her claws, tail wagging with the ring of the bell.

It's me, Sam, words that feels trapped in his heart amidst the devastation of what they had become.

Blue eyes wide, his face bare for the truth of who he was, staring down at Sam whose harsh grip on his hoodie loosens.

And for that single moment, it's just the two of them.

Just-

Tommy and Sam.

A tired grouchy teenager protesting over the silly animal shaped cookies as Sam worked away in the kitchen, the air heavy with the scent of food and bakery, the radio playing some old song that Sam would hum away to.

No Heroes.

No Villains.

The blood from Sam's side is darkening the water, spiralling around them both.

"Tommy." His name leaves Sam's mouth in a stream of white bubbles and-

He finds himself let go.

Tommy's eyes widens, his mouth opening in a shout in the blood stained water, twisting and reaching out, fingers only narrowly wrapping around his mask as it's released from Sam's limp fingers.

There's no way to reach him, Sam sinking too fast, back into the depth, hand still outstretched towards him.

Tommy's chest and eyes are burning and his mouth opening, screaming, for a moment suspended in the all-consuming darkness, tasting blood and salt on his tongue, feeling his neck and shoulders prickle and burn, two powers wrestling inside of him before he pushes his mask back and twists, kicking furiously and blindly in the direction of the surface.

Because the world is ugly, a place of desperate hollow survival that beats with the pounding of his heart even when he hates it.

The cold wraps around him and he chokes on a sob, feeling so frightfully *lost* in the big dark depth as the current pushes at him, twisting him in the water until he claws himself free of it and-

This can't be the end.

He feels turned around, Dream's power streaking through the water, desperately pushing onwards because-

This can't be the end.

It can't, it can't, it can't-

The red flickers, heat licking at his throat, something tearing on his back, mouth parting with a stream of bubbles as he chokes.

The cold wraps heavy around him in the merciless embrace of the sea, and he jerks as something surges into view, twisting with a spread of wide wings that turn from metal to feathers to halt the abrupt descent, blond hair, lighter than his own, a hand reaching out to clasp his.

The Angel of Death draws him up against him, an arm wrapping around his midriff, Tommy's curling instinctively to wrap around the back of the man's neck, fingers sinking stiffly into the wet fabric.

And-

Phil's *warm*, his wings spreading out, rising and flapping sharply down, propelling them up with a rush of the water around them.

The arm keeps him anchored and Tommy watches the dark depth and the swirl of bubbles as each strong beat carries them further and further.

His fingers curls tighter into Phil's sweater, lungs burning, something crackling at the back of his throat.

They break the surface harshly and Tommy sucks down a desperate rush of air, coughing and choking, smoke escaping the vents of his mask, seeping into the dark night as a hand pats against his back.

“Let it all out, mate,” the Angel of Death tells him, arm strong and secure around him as Tommy wheezes, lungs burning, the cold night air somehow even worse than the chill of the ocean.

“Fuck you,” Tommy tells him miserably.

Somehow, this startles a small laugh, a warm thing that rumbles through the chest he’s pressed against. “Fair enough,” Phil murmurs. “Come on, let’s get you back to shore.”

Tommy sinks his chin against Phil’s shoulder, lethargic and exhausted and miserably cold.

“Ranboo is dead,” he murmurs, fighting against the insane urge to bury his face into Phil’s neck, to tuck himself away, to pretend the world is kinder than it is.

Phil’s muscles tightens for a moment before he lets out a breath. “I know, Judge told us.”

“Oh.” Tommy blinks. “I’m sorry, I-“

A low crooning noise makes his teeth click shut, brain fuzzing and muscles going limp with a startled little noise that gets caught in his throat with a clack of his teeth.

“You can tell us all about it later.” Phil hauls him up more securely against him and Tommy clumsily wraps his legs around his waist, feeling very much like a child, ridiculously so with Wilbur’s father holding him close. “Take a moment and just breathe, mate. I’ve got you.”

I’ve got you.

Tommy’s eyes flutters, a numb sort of strange feeling settling heavy in his chest.

Below him in the dark depths, somewhere, he imagines Sam’s golden armour falling softly against the sand in a pillow of white dust.

And- if Phil feels any of the tears that drops warm against his neck he makes no mention of it as his free arm strokes easily through the cold water, taking them closer and closer to the waiting figure of Techno at the shore.

Chapter End Notes

AND that's the end folks, of the third arc that is, which means we're onto the fourth and final one.

and to think, in just a few short days, it's gonna be two years since the first chapter of hush was posted. what a ride it's been, and still yet more to go.

so- sam, huh? a complicated dude, to the very end. but he loved tommy more than he hated red chaos. gonna miss him.

i will explain tommy/dream's power in a bit more detail at one point, there really wasn't any place for it, mans was a bit preoccupied from going on an internal monologue. but think of it as pure energy, kinda, that he directs the use of to increase his speed and strength. there's a bit more to it but for now i'm leaving it at that :)

(on a small note: actions are my weakness, and this chapter was pretty much all action sequences, don't look too hard at them, i was crying internally while editing after erasing my 90th use of twisting to find anything to replace it with and rework sentences)

i hope you're having a good one, wherever you are out there in the world when this chapter finds you<3

-

If you're interested there's a [Hush Now Discord](#) that tends to go *brrrr* with the theories in designated channels and also have a lot of fun chatter and chill people on top of scoops of chaos with my lovely mods<3

There's also a Hush Now Index created by me and Isa, and you can access it in the "Hush Now Index" channel on my server for those of you who are interested! Hella shout-out to Isa for the incredible work she put into it<3 It looks amazing.

You can find me on **tumblr** here: [corpse-art](#)

And I'm also on **twitter**:

main: [corpsey_art](#)

alt (where i just post prompts): [corpseyreads](#)

I post a one hour countdown on all my social medias for a new chapter update if you're interested in such a thing :)

-

DUDES. We have new Hush Now art!! They're all amazing. Go and give them all so much love<3

(And if I ever miss linking your art- pls let me know!! I try to make sure I keep track of everything but I am but human)

[shadow puppers by marvels-obscure-tophat](#)
[FANART MASTERPOST](#)

Works inspired by this one

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